

**‘BUT WHERE ON EARTH IS HOME?’
A CULTURAL HISTORY OF BLACK BRITAIN IN 1970s FILM
AND TELEVISION**

Sally Shaw

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of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth**

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DECLARATION

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach in order to explore the social and cultural history of black Britain in 1970s fictional film and television. It draws on rigorous archival research, original interview testimony with practitioners and audience members, and close textual analysis of visual sources, in order to examine relations between black film and television texts and the social, political and institutional contexts of their authorship. The key focus of my study is therefore on black creative agency. Whilst prior studies have addressed black expression and representation in film and television, few have attempted to trace the process of creativity itself. My study uniquely traces the black creative voice in an historical period of emergence and conflict, and endeavours to ‘map’ it in terms of networks of (white and black) practitioners, the spaces of industrial production and the metaphorical, geographical and diasporic spaces of community and socio-political action.

The thesis is structured in two parts. In Part 2, my ‘mapping’ encompasses a broad landscape – I ‘map the field’ socio-politically and then provide a survey of the significant range of feature films and television programmes concerned with black Britain in the 1970s. I then present three case studies. These are chosen for their variety of genre and form, for the valuable insights they offer into production and reception histories, and because they demonstrate the usefulness of the imaginative interpretation of archival and interview material in reappraising film and television texts in their historical contexts. In Part 3, I then draw on this methodological approach in order to ‘map’ the creative journey of the poet and playwright Jamal Ali, who worked in radical black theatre, film and television in the 1970s. Ali’s story provides an exemplar for the exploration of black creative agency in this period. Furthermore, the Brixton of Ali’s life and work is explored both as a site of socio-political struggle and as a liminal space in which diasporic community and black identity are imaginatively located.

DISSEMINATION

Publications

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Shaw, S. (2012). A 'country boy' migrates to Brixton – re-examining agency, identity and memory in and through *Black Joy*. *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, 3 (2), 271-282.

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Presentations

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DEDICATION

For my wonderful grandmother, Barbara Brackley.

CONTENTS TO VOLUME ONE

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Sources	10
1.3 Methodology and Structure	24

PART 2 - MAPPING THE FIELD

2.1 Mapping the field 1: Socio-political context	41
2.2 Mapping the field 2: A survey of black film and television	66
2.3 Case Study 1: <i>Love Thy Neighbour</i>	108
2.4 Case Study 2: <i>Babylon</i>	126
2.5 Case Study 3: <i>A Hole in Babylon</i>	143

PART 3 – BLACK AGENCY AND EXPRESSION AND ITS CROSS-MEDIA ADAPTATION: AN EXTENDED CASE STUDY ON JAMAL ALI

Introduction to Part 3	163
3.1 Background, biography and theatre	164
3.2 From stage to television: <i>Black Feet in the Snow</i>	190
3.3 From stage to feature film: <i>Black Joy</i>	218
3.4 ‘Bringing it all back home’: <i>Black Joy</i> comes to Brixton	250

CONCLUSION

<i>Bibliography (Books and Journals)</i>	300
<i>Bibliography (Archival Sources)</i>	309
<i>Bibliography (Interviews)</i>	315
<i>Bibliography (Film)</i>	316
<i>Bibliography (Television)</i>	318
<i>Bibliography (Stage Plays)</i>	320

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This work is the result of my involvement with an AHRC-funded project on British cinema of the 1970s at the University of Portsmouth (2006-2009). This project fostered my interest in black British cinema and television of the period, for which I subsequently received an AHRC (open-competition) doctoral studentship award.

This study is a social and cultural history of black Britain in 1970s film and television. As such it examines relations between black film and television texts and the social, political and institutional contexts of their authorship. The primary focus of my study is on black creative agency. The question that is posed throughout this thesis is: what happened to black creative agency in what was a politically contested arena? ‘But where on earth is home?’ is a quote from Jamal Ali’s 1972 play *Black Feet in the Snow*. As well as highlighting the centrality of Ali’s work to this study, it captures the theme of a diasporic search for home and belonging, which is implicit in many of the texts that I have surveyed and emphasises aspects of community relations and cultural geography which are key to my work.

This thesis will explore the wide range of creative interventions by black writers, directors and actors in film and television the 1970s. In so doing it will address a number of key questions. To begin with, the black experience was articulated across an unprecedented range of fictional forms in film and television during the 1970s and the decade witnessed the ‘coming of age’ of ‘second generation’ black British youths. Why was this the case? What was the impact of this demographic in terms

of creative expression and reception? Firstly, what were the socio-political, cultural and institutional factors that determined this work? In particular, feature film and television work frequently relied upon white collaborators and gatekeepers. What was the function of institutional dynamics in both enabling and constraining black creativity? Secondly, how were black voices modulated across different media forms, through writing, direction, performance and music? Thirdly, in various ways, all of the texts in this study engage with the turbulent race relations of the decade. How was the socio-political struggle addressed through different fictional film and television texts? How was this experience reflected and refracted in different forms? And in what ways were the meanings of texts negotiated and/or contested by audiences? Fourthly, in both feature film and television plays, documentary realism was the dominant mode used in the portrayal of the black experience. Why was this the case and what do the rare exceptions to this aesthetic reveal about black creative expression and the negotiation of socio-political identity? Finally, many of the texts were shot on location in particular inner-city areas of London, and some specifically focus on Brixton. What were the reasons for this focus? What was the significance of community dynamics within particular spatial locations in fostering black creativity and cultural identity?

Rationale

Given that the 1970s gave rise to unprecedented creative expression on the part of black practitioners working in the fields of film, television and theatre in Britain, it is important in cultural history to understand why certain groups are able to gain a voice at particular times and not at others. This is a key question addressed in my

study. Moreover, this study places emphasis on the ways in which fictional film and television texts address the realities of a turbulent period in British race relations. It is crucial that we understand the power and complexity of fictional film and television texts in articulating this socio-political struggle. Therefore, a further aim of this study is to attempt to explore the political function of popular texts.

Importantly, whilst prior studies have addressed black expression and representation in film and television, few have attempted to recover and trace the process of creativity *itself*. My study uniquely traces the black creative voice and endeavours to ‘map’ it in terms of networks of (white and black) practitioners, the spaces of industrial production, the metaphorical and geographical spaces of community and socio-political action. In Part 2 this mapping encompasses a broad landscape; in Part 3 it is traced in detail through the creative journey of the poet and playwright Jamal Ali. It is only in recovering the complexities of the creative process, I contend, that we can begin to understand the determinants that enable, constrain, and ultimately shape the voices of oppressed minorities.

By this means, my study foregrounds the examination of black creative agency in a way that existing work in the field has not. In drawing upon ideas of cultural geography, this study uniquely helps to (re)locate individual creativity within the liminal communities in which cultural texts are both produced and understood.

Definitions

Before proceeding further, it is important that three key terms that are central to the thesis are addressed. Indeed these help to define the parameters of the research. The

key terms are ‘black’, ‘race relations’ and ‘diaspora’. Throughout this study, I will use the term ‘black’ to denote ‘people of African and Afro-Caribbean descent’ (see Cole, 1993, p.672). However, I remain mindful that ‘black’ is *itself* a contested term and is subject to differing definitions. As Stuart Hall reminds us ‘‘black’ is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category’ [original emphasis] (1996, p. 443). As Hall rightly argues, there are no ‘fixed ... racial categories ... in nature’ – in other words, we should reflect on the fact that the term ‘black’ carries problematic essentialist connotations (1996, p.443). Hall is not suggesting that we drop the term (not least because it can be a locus of self-identification and/or a signifier of political affiliation, as in the case of Black Power, for example), but rather we need to be mindful of the ‘diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects’ (1996, p.443). In this way, some ‘activists and writers’ have historically used ‘black’ as a political term which refers not only to people of African and Afro-Caribbean heritage, but also to people of Asian and other minority ethnic groups; ‘in fact to *all* who are oppressed on racial grounds’ [original emphasis] (Cole, 1993, p.672). However, as Mike Cole points out, this ‘all-encompassing’ definition would necessarily include groups who would be unlikely to self-identify as ‘black’, such as Irish and Jewish people (1993, p.672). A narrower definition of the term therefore includes those of African and Caribbean descent and those of Asian descent. Indeed, Kobena Mercer’s understanding of ‘black’ within the context of film and television studies, encompasses people of African and Caribbean descent *and* those of Asian descent (see Julien and Mercer, 1996, p.450). However, in *Representing Black Britain* (2002), Sarita Malik refers to ‘Black and Asian’ people, rather than using ‘black’ as an umbrella term, and this is increasingly the case in film and television (and theatre) studies (2002, p.3). My own usage of

‘black’ to refer to those of African and Afro-Caribbean heritage is largely based on the fact that the practitioners and texts that I have surveyed within this thesis and are primarily concerned with (or from) what were contemporaneously called Britain’s ‘West Indian’ communities. I could have stuck to this term (indeed, the archival nature of this study means that ‘West Indian’ is sometimes used in this thesis). But it is an outmoded term which carries colonial connotations and, unlike ‘black’, it was not used by my interviewees. Nonetheless, I remain aware that my particular use of ‘black’ within this thesis is to some degree permeable.

The term ‘race relations’ is used throughout this thesis. This is largely due to the fact that much of my research is concerned with social policy (and necessarily includes detail about the 1968 and 1976 Race Relations Acts). Moreover, throughout the 1970s, the term ‘race relations’ was in wide usage, both publically and institutionally. Therefore, given the archival nature of this thesis, it has been necessary for me to use this term. Nevertheless, I am mindful that ‘race relations’ is a sociologically-contested term and is not unproblematic – where possible, then, I reflect on the notion of diaspora (below).

Diaspora refers to ‘displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration or exile’ (Brazier and Mannur, 2003, p.1). However, in *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy provides a more nuanced definition which is more pertinent to my own study.

Gilroy highlights the creative cultural exchanges, spaces of belonging and ‘contact zones’ that occur ‘between (at least) two ... cultural assemblages’ (2003, p.54: p.50). In this way, Gilroy foregrounds the notion of ‘double consciousness’ – an acute awareness of both ‘home’ and the so-called ‘host communit(ies)’. As he argues, to occupy ‘the space between them or [to] ... try to demonstrate their continuity [is]

viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of insubordination’ (2003, p.50). In this way, creative cultural expression and the political are perhaps inextricably linked. For Stuart Hall, to be part of the black diaspora is to live a ‘narrative of displacement ... [an] endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’’ (1994, p.402). Indeed, such a narrative permeates many of the texts in this thesis. Important to this study is Benedict Anderson’s idea of ‘an imagined community’, which constructs diaspora in terms of a metaphorical journey (1991, pp.6-7). To follow Anderson, those of the ‘second-generation’, born in the ‘host country’ have an *imagined* idea of ‘home’ in which the ‘desire to return to lost origins’ is perhaps even stronger, given that it can never be fully realised (see Hall, 1994, p.399).

Parameters of the research

Chronology

Cultural history does not fall into neat decades, but the 1970s witnessed a rare and diverse outpouring of black creative expression in Britain. One of the aims of my study is to explain why. In order to enable a full account it will be useful *pace* Marwick (1998), to posit a ‘long 1970s’, beginning in 1967 and ending (with the advent of Channel 4, the Workshops Declaration, Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective) in 1982. Whilst my focus is on the 1970s, this decade can be seen to have its roots in the cultural revolution of the late 1960s – a period of liberalising reforms, social democracy and the rise of countercultural movements (Cooke, 2003, p.90). Indeed, despite the 1970s being (rightly) characterised as a decade of social and economic turmoil, it is important also to remember the liberalising legislation of the period, not least the 1976 Race Relations Act. Countercultural British Black

Power groups, whose ideologies were to inform black political and creative endeavours throughout the 1970s, can also be traced back to the mid-1960s and were given further impetus following Stokely Carmichael's appearance at the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation Conference in London. Equally, the 1970s cast a shadow over the decade that followed it. Most obviously, this can be seen in the continued dominance of the New Right, following Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979. However, the 1981 riots in Brixton, Handsworth, Chapeltown and Toxteth were the inevitable result of the racial disadvantage, police brutality and inner-city decline of the previous decade and can be seen as something of a watershed in British race relations. In terms of black production, the advent of Channel 4 in 1982, with its policies to actively promote multicultural programme making, perhaps signalled a move away from the informal black creative networks of the 1970s, most obviously with its support for black film cooperatives under the aegis of the Workshops Declaration. For the purposes of my study then, whilst the 1970s is the period that is primarily covered, I am aware of the socio-political porousness of the decade. In short, I shall remain mindful of the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation Conference, the 1981 Brixton riots and the advent of Channel 4 a year later – these events serve to both reflexively inform and to bookend my research.

Fictional film and television

This thesis is primarily concerned with *fictional* representations of black Britain in 1970s television and feature film. It should be noted that given my focus on agency, this study will also touch on black community theatre as an important locus of black creative and political expression. My focus on fictional texts is partly pragmatic; it

simply would not be possible to cover all non-fictional films and television as well. But furthermore, my contention is that fictional forms not only enable a multi-faceted exploration of the socio-political situation in complex and varied ways, but they also reveal much about struggles for black expression and the ways in which debates about race were contested and understood. In short, by dint of their different formal elements and modes of address, fictional texts engage with the socio-political landscape *and* reveal much about black agency and audience reception in ways that documentary sources cannot. Often more direct and compelling, sometimes more subtle and allusive, fictional forms arguably provide a far richer seam of evidence. Some parallels can perhaps be drawn with Edward Braun's study of British television drama and feature film concerned with Northern Ireland in the period 1984-1992. As Braun asserted, in this case, the fictional form allowed for 'controls [such as the British government's ban on reportage of the so-called 'shoot to kill policy' in Northern Ireland] to be evaded ... positions could be occupied by dramatists that were denied to news reporting and documentary features' (2000, p.115). Similarly, I argue that it is the case that fictional forms afforded the airing of controversial socio-political narratives that could not have been easily addressed in the factual documentary form. Moreover, fictional forms seemingly enabled black practitioners greater access to the means of production than documentary (although Horace Ové provides a notable exception to this). Certainly, Martin McLoone's assertion that, 'Authored drama is almost a licence to give an opinion. It's a way of saying things that wouldn't normally get said', is deeply pertinent to this thesis (McLoone, cited in Braun, 2000, p.115). In the case of my study, this can be extended not only to feature films and single plays, but also sitcoms, a drama series and the soap opera.

Selection criteria

Whilst necessarily concerned with issues of representation, the emphasis of this study is on black agency and self-expression. Therefore, I am not going to look at every example of a fictional text in which a black person is represented on screen in the 1970s (if such an exercise were indeed useful). Rather, my focus is on major interventions by black creative practitioners. Firstly, I understand the term ‘black practitioners’ to mean not only the creative expression of writers and directors, but also of actors. I argue that performance is an important locus of black expression. Secondly, my study will obviously include those feature films and television programmes which had a black writer and/or director. However, given that this study is also concerned with reception, the impact of white-authored high-profile controversial television sitcoms such as *Love Thy Neighbour* (1972-76, Thames Television) cannot be ignored. What was the audience response to the show? How did it enable issues of race to be negotiated? Any cultural history of the decade must be concerned with such questions. Moreover, my nuanced definition of ‘black practitioners’ and emphasis on agency and reception necessarily allows for the inclusion of ostensibly white-authored films such as *Babylon* (Rosso, 1980) – a text positioned by audiences and actors as a ‘black film’. Thirdly, some of the texts have been selected on the grounds that they are sites of particular innovation. This may be in terms of genre (such as a black soap opera or documentary-drama) or in terms of formal innovation (such as a rare example of a move away from the documentary realist aesthetic). What this study aims to convey is the nature of black creative expression during the 1970s as evidenced through the exploration of a variety of interventions.

1.2 - Sources

Secondary sources

As a study in cultural history this thesis raises a number of questions. It is therefore necessary that a range of different types of literature are deployed in the process of answering these questions. In terms of approaches to film history, *The New Film History* (2007) makes the case for archival investigation into film history and importantly for my study, highlights filmmaking as an industrial process and argues that film authorship is the result of the ‘input of a range of creative agencies’ (Chapman et al. 2007, p.69). An analogous approach to researching television history is taken in *British Television Drama* (Bignell et al. 2000). Jonathan Bignell et al. stress the need for archival research and practitioner interviews and argue that ‘the mechanics of television production ... should be factored in to discussions concerning issues of television aesthetics’ (Bignell et al., 2000, p.3). Recovering production histories, then, can tell us much about the issues of creative agency and authorship which shaped the texts produced. These approaches therefore have been influential to my study.

In terms of the cultural history of the period in question, although much has been written about British black feature film and television in broader terms, there is no study that deals specifically with 1970s black film and television. Consequently, I have drawn upon chapters and books which deal more generally with the 1970s, and those which have black feature film and/or television as their focus within a wider

range of decades. In terms of books which examine film in the decade, Sue Harper and Justin Smith's *British Film Culture in the 1970s – The Boundaries of Pleasure* (2012), establishes the fragmented conditions of the film culture of the period and illustrates how this climate enabled new interventions from a number of quarters, one of which was black film. *Don't Look Now – British Cinema in the 1970s* (2010) is a collection edited by Paul Newland that investigates film culture and the production history of both mainstream and 'forgotten' texts. Particularly useful to my study is Newland's detailed archival-based study on *Babylon* and Josie Dolan and Andrew Spicer's chapter about the work of Anthony Simmons. In *British Films of the 1970s* (2013), Paul Newland documents key films of the decade within the framework of filmmaking culture and broader ideas of national identity. This focus is pertinent to my study, as is Newland's chapter on British black and Asian film.

Several studies focus on black British film and have been useful to my thesis. *Black Film – British Cinema* (1988), is a collection of essays edited by Kobena Mercer which includes critical writing on *Pressure* (Ové, 1975) and the black film cooperatives of the 1980s. Lola Young's *Fear of the Dark – Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (1996) takes as its main focus the representation of black women in film. Young discusses a selection of films from 1959 to 1987 and one chapter deals exclusively with representations of 'the black experience' in 1970s British film. Whilst Young's emphasis on representation has limited use to a study concerned with creative agency, she provides a detailed discussion on post-colonial theory, an understanding of which is vital to my study. Such ideas are usefully outlined in Stuart Hall's seminal essay *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* (1996), which also explores the concept of a 'diaspora aesthetic' in

post-colonial filmmaking. This focus allows for an understanding of the creative process in relation to broader questions of fluid diasporic ‘routes’.

Another body of work relates to black British television. Sarita Malik’s *Representing Black Britain – Black and Asian Images on Television* (2002), is concerned with the representation of black and Asian people on television from the 1950s to 2000. Malik deals with both the fictional and documentary form and her work is necessarily broad in scope – she is not, for example, concerned with audience reception. However, Malik’s account of the ‘race sitcoms’ of the late 1960s and 1970s is particularly useful to my study, as is her writing on the shifting institutional context of television production. In *Paving the Empire Road – BBC Television and Black Britons* (2011), Darrell Newton draws on extensive archival research and interviews with key practitioners in order to give an historical analysis of BBC’s output of television (and radio) programmes concerned with Britain’s Afro-Caribbean population. Newton’s study spans fictional and documentary programming from the mid-1940s to 2004. His work is useful to my study as it is primarily concerned with the institutional context and as such, documents changing policies and practices within the BBC – he also includes correspondence from viewers about specific programmes. Particularly helpful to my study is Newton’s empirical approach, his specific focus on the Afro-Caribbean population, and his work on *Empire Road* (1978-79, BBC2) and BBC2’s *Open Door* strand. Gavin Schaffer’s *The Vision of a Nation – Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (2014) deals with both BBC and ITV and uses archival research and interviews with producers and writers in order to explore fictional and documentary programmes. This work is useful to my study in terms of its coverage of both channels, its empirical approach and the specific historical period that it covers.

Pertinent to my research is Schaffer's overarching contention that diverse genres of programming impacted differently on nuanced understandings of race relations and multiculturalism during the period. Stephen Bourne's survey, *Black in the British Frame – The Black Experience in British Film and Television* (2001), aims to give an overview of black actors, writers and directors from the early days of feature film and television to the millennium. Whilst Bourne's entries about individual films and television programmes and the personnel involved in making them are necessarily brief, his work is useful to my thesis as it includes material on black practitioners that have sometimes been omitted from other studies. Bourne's book dovetails neatly with Jim Pines' *Black and White in Colour – Black People in Television Since 1936* (1992). Pines provides a collection of interviews with black actors and other personnel involved in British television which covers the 1970s period. Given the temporal scope of Pines' work, his interviews are understandably focussed on what he regards as being historically important texts and 'key' practitioners and, as such, may necessarily gloss over some work (and personnel) of the decade. Nevertheless, many of the interviews have been very useful to my study, not least because some of the practitioners interviewed are no longer living. In the same way, Norman Beaton's autobiography, *Beaton but Unbowed* (1986), provided me with a highly detailed account of the late actor's work in film, television, and theatre in the 1970s, which I have drawn on throughout this study.

In order to understand the origins of many of the black writers and practitioners in this study, it is necessary to consider the important role of black theatre. Colin Chambers' *Black and Asian Theatre in Britain* (2011), gives an exhaustive account of the history of black theatre, and in a chapter on the 1970s, he provides a detailed account of black community theatre groups (with a particular focus on London).

This has been invaluable to my study, not least in helping to trace the history of Jamal Ali's involvement with RAPP (Radical Alliance of Poets and Players) and the Black Theatre of Brixton. Catherine Ugwu's 1995 edited collection, *Let's Get it On – The Politics of Black Performance*, is focussed on black live art. Whilst the book covers both British and American politicised live art, important for my study is the book's foregrounding of the artistically hybrid nature of radical black theatre, and its discussion of African and Caribbean orature.

In terms of social policy and cultural history, race relations in Britain in the 1970s have been well-documented, although only a small proportion of the literature deals with this decade alone and a detailed overview has to be necessarily gleaned from various sources. Race relations, racial conflict and deprivation, and ideas of an emergent multicultural society were extensively discussed by social scientists, policy makers and activists during the 1970s. Contemporaneous studies by sociologists have been important to my study in terms of providing nuanced social and historical background. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (CCCS), was at the forefront of work about race and racism in 1970s Britain, the most well-known being *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978). Its analysis of the construction of the 'black mugger' in the popular press and the heavy-handed policing of black people in the decade is pertinent to my study, as is a further CCCS publication, *The Empire Strikes Back – Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982). This edited collection of essays provides a critique of education, policing and employment in relation to Britain's black communities. Ernest Cashmore's *Rastaman: The Rastafarian Movement in England* (1979) gives a detailed account of the Rastafarian movement and its growing popularity among 'second generation' black British youths in the 1970s. Particularly useful for my study is Cashmore's writing on the

political nature of British reggae music and its centrality to black resistance and creative expression. Ken Pryce's *Endless Pressure* (1979) is an ethnography of his own community in Bristol in the mid-1970s. *Endless Pressure* is highly detailed and covers many aspects of what Pryce terms as 'West Indian lifestyles' (such as religious worship, entertainment and family life) (1979, p.xi). Pryce's focus on a single location and the cultural meanings and importance of certain spaces/places therein has been influential to my study, as has his foregrounding of personal narrative, and his illuminating discussion of the local popularity of blaxploitation films.

Subsequently much has been written about race relations in 1970s Britain, although a large proportion of these texts are chapters in books which also deal with other historical decades. Three such texts have been particularly useful to my study. Peter Fryer's informative, *Staying Power – The History of Black People in Britain* (1987), has provided historical contextualisation for the purposes of this study, not least because the second section of the book gives a detailed socio-political account of the black experience from the 1940s onwards and includes a chapter on the experiences of 'second-generation' black youths living in Britain in the 1970s. In his collection of essays, *A Different Hunger* (1987), Sivanandan writes about black oppression, the Black Power movement, and key figures in black culture. Especially useful to my study is Sivanandan's critique of British immigration and race policies, and his insight into black political resistance and 'grassroots' activism in Britain from the 1960s onwards. John Solomos' *Race and Racism in Britain* (2003) explores the relationship between the 'politics of race and wider processes of economic, social and cultural change' from the period 1940 -2002 (2003, p.236). Solomos' focus on

this relationship is pertinent to my study and his work on race and immigration policy in the 1970s is concise but illuminating.

This study has also drawn on work in cultural geography and diaspora. In *Cultural Geography* (1998), Mike Crang examines the ways in which geographical space/place are used and negotiated by communities in identity formation.

Importantly for my study, Crang is concerned with the process whereby creativity and political activity can ‘come together in particular places and how those places develop meanings for’ certain groups (Crang, 1998, p.3). Crang’s notion of ‘micro-geography’, which examines the ‘intimate and personal scale of things’ in a

community, is pertinent to my study, not least in my nascent ‘mapping’ of spaces/places of diasporic political and creative activity in 1970s Brixton. James Clifford’s *Routes – Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), is a ‘collage’ of formal essays, poetic meditations and ‘experiments in travel writing’ which examine the complex movements (and translations) of peoples, cultures, and discourses (1997, p.12). Clifford draws upon complex notions of ‘crossings’,

diaspora and travel in his revaluation of the translation and display of non-Western arts and cultural artefacts in Western museums and collections. Clifford’s work is useful to my study in many ways, but its eclectic methodological approach (see part 1.3 of this thesis) and its foregrounding of the notion of (often contested) ‘contact zones’ both between and within cultures are particularly helpful. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (2003) examines ‘black cultural production’ and argues that the diasporic exchange of the ‘black Atlantic’ allows for unique and dynamic spaces and new forms of creativity (2003, p.49). Gilroy’s study highlights the complex histories and geographies of black migration and travel, both voluntary and forced (Clifford, 1997, p.262). This, allied with Gilroy’s related notion of diasporic ‘double

consciousness' has been important to my study, dealing as it does with 'mapping' black creative agency. Rajinder Dudrah's *Bollywood Travels – Culture, Diaspora and Border Crossings in Popular Hindi Cinema* (2012), uses an interdisciplinary framework to examine diasporic culture and border crossings 'in and through' popular Hindi films. As Dudrah compellingly argues, diasporic 'audiences use and re-use ... film as popular culture in their furthering of everyday scripts and narratives about themselves' – a notion particularly pertinent to my study in terms of the complex reception of film and television texts (2012, p.70). Important to my study also is Dudrah's contention that diaspora is a dynamic notion – far from simply considering 'flows' from 'home' to the place of settlement and back again, diaspora is understood in terms of 'socio-cultural loops, dynamics' and 'culturally osmotic processes ... with lines of flight and points of crossings and connections, to other places and spaces beyond' (2012, p.100).

Primary sources

Whilst this eclectic range of literature has been vital to the interdisciplinary approach this thesis adopts, the fundamental questions about the nature of black creative agency in Britain in the 1970s can only be answered fully with recourse to primary sources: archival materials and original interviews with key individuals.

Archival sources

I have collected material from a range of archives and the reasons for my eclecticism are twofold. Firstly, archival evidence pertaining to 1970s film and television is notoriously patchy and a certain amount of creativity on the part of the researcher is required when investigating this period. To this end, whilst the BFI and the BBC Written Archives are invaluable resources, alternative archives can sometimes help

to fill in ‘gaps’. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the interdisciplinary nature of this study made it imperative to use not only those archives primarily concerned with film and television but also those which could shed light on race relations, socio-political history, black community theatre and cultural geography. I will now discuss my choice of archival evidence.

I will firstly turn to archives concerned with film and television. At the BFI library (now Reuben library), I sourced contemporaneous articles about *Pressure*, *Black Joy* (Simmons, 1977) and *Babylon* in trade journals such as *Monthly Film Bulletin* and magazines including *Time Out* and *The Listener*. These and other contemporaneous publications housed at the archive provided vital information concerning film production, interviews with actors and other personnel involved with filmmaking, and the critical reception of films. I also used the listings in *Time Out* magazine to look at patterns of exhibition for *Black Joy* (Simmons, 1977) in London. I also viewed television programmes which are not available on VHS or DVD. These included the BBC *Open Door* production, *Black Feet in the Snow* (1974, BBC2) and episodes of *Empire Road*.

The BBFC provided access to the British Board of Film Censors reports on *Pressure* and *Babylon* (sadly those on *Black Joy* are missing) – these provide an illuminating insight into institutional responses to the films.

The film producer Gavrik Losey’s papers, housed at The Bill Douglas Centre at the University of Exeter, yielded detailed archival material pertaining to the production history of *Babylon*. In addition to Losey’s personal correspondence with institutions such as the BBFC and the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) and personnel involved in the production, the archive also contained press releases and, memos and

letters from the film's location manager. This rich data enabled me to gain a thorough insight not only into the film's production history, but also into Losey's marketing strategies for the film.

The BBC Written Archives at Caversham provided me with archival material pertaining to *Black Feet in the Snow* – this included BBC press releases about the programme, internal memos and a shooting script. This gave an insight into the production history of the programme and also enabled me to understand the way in which technological innovations such as colour separation overlay (CSO) enhanced the Brechtian aesthetics of Jamal Ali's original play.

The IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) archives at Bournemouth University provided audience and institutional correspondence, and an IBA-commissioned audience survey pertaining to the sitcom *Love Thy Neighbour*. Given the paucity of archival material concerning audience reception for the period *and* the controversial nature of the text, this was an invaluable source for my study. It enabled me to gain an understanding of the nuanced contemporaneous audience and institutional responses to the programme in a way that secondary sources could not.

Beyond dedicated film and television archives, other archival sources were used in this study. The Institute of Race Relations (IRR), London, houses the radical black grassroots newspaper, *Flame*. *Flame* both reported on black politics and cultural activity *and* was an important locus of black activism. Moreover, it was a London-based publication and much of it is concerned with the capital's black communities. It was therefore useful to my study on a number of levels. Firstly, it contained film, theatre and music reviews which were useful given that they were written from a black radical and community perspective. Secondly, the newspaper gave a valuable

insight into the socio-political preoccupations of certain sections of the black community during the period, covering issues such as police harassment and brutality, inequalities in the education system and inner-city deprivation. Thirdly, the publication helped in my geographical mapping of spaces/locations of black political activism in London.

The University of Portsmouth's library houses a collection of the radical magazine, *Race Today*, which spans the decade of the 1970s. The publication was edited by the prominent black activist Darcus Howe and the poet and musician, Linton Kwesi Johnson. *Race Today* is written from a radical viewpoint and is concerned with notions of black struggle and resistance. It therefore contains contemporaneous articles about issues such as the harassment and abuse of black people by the police, the 'bussing' of black children to inferior schools and inequalities in the justice system. To this end, it provides useful socio-political context for my study. Helpful to my study is also the fact that in the mid-1970s, *Race Today* began to view black cultural activity as a political act in *itself* and began to regularly devote column space to reviews of film, television, theatre and music. Finally, *Race Today*, whilst primarily concerned with Britain also strongly engages with politics in Africa and the Caribbean. In this way, it provides an important reminder (and a political reinforcement) of the diasporic nature of black communities, which is pertinent to my study. The University of Portsmouth's library also contains contemporaneous reports which have been particularly useful to my study. The Home Office commissioned PEP (Political and Economic Planning) report *Racial Disadvantage in Britain* (Smith, 1977), and the Institute of Race Relations' (IRR) report *Police Against Black People* (1979) both provided insights for my study into the socio-political (and economic) positioning of black communities during the decade. I have

also been mindful of *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981* (Scarman, 1982), which argued that the Brixton riots were the result of socio-political factors rooted in the 1970s.

The Lambeth Archives in Brixton houses microfiche copies of the local *South London Press* newspaper for the decade of the 1970s. This source has been invaluable to my study in a number of ways. Firstly, the newspaper covers stories in the Lambeth area of London and as such gives a useful insight into community relations of the period and is helpful for socio-political contextualisation in my study. Secondly, much of the focus of the reportage is on Brixton and covers cultural events such as plays at local community theatres (such as the Black Theatre of Brixton). Indeed, the *South London Press*' reviews of Jamal Ali's stage productions and other articles concerning his involvement with black theatre has helped me to both trace and geographically situate his work. Thirdly, the *South London Press* contains local cinema listings which include Brixton's ACE cinema – this was especially helpful to my work on the community response to *Babylon*. Finally, I have been able to use some of the stories in the *South London Press* to help me to 'map' Brixton in the 1970s which is pertinent to the cultural geographical element of my study – a strong sense of transient and unstable space/place emerges, not least because Brixton was undergoing major redevelopment during the decade and streets such as Villa Road were threatened with demolition (eventually rescinded).

Interview testimony

I have conducted interviews with a variety of practitioners working in the fields of black film, television and theatre. I have also interviewed audience members.

Interview testimony can give us something that secondary sources and the archive cannot – the interviews have helped me to understand more about the stimuli and constraints of black creative agency, the creative struggles involved in cultural production and the contested field in which these works were negotiated and understood.

Within this thesis, the term ‘testimony’ can be understood within the broad context of oral history practice. To follow Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, ‘testimony’, in this sense underlines the agency of the interviewee, who, ‘through the process of remembering and reinterpreting the past’, is empowered and perhaps ‘written back’ into history (Perks and Thomson, 2008, p.x). Within this interpretation, the word ‘testimony’ is divorced from legalistic discourse; rather it suggests ‘the personal’ and reflexive aspects of the interview process (Perks and Thomson, 2008, p.xi). The dynamic and productive relationship between interviewer and interviewee has been central to my approach to oral history in this work, and, I would argue, places value on the testimony of the participants (see pages 36-39 of this thesis).

I will now provide brief details of the interviews that I have conducted for this thesis. The poet and playwright Jamal Ali was interviewed twice for this study. In the first interview, he discussed his work on *Black Joy* and the way in which his work was necessarily interconnected with his personal biography, black politics and Brixton’s black community. In a further interview, Ali focussed his discussion on his extensive work with black community theatre and the adaptation of his stage play *Black Feet in the Snow* for BBC television. A key element of this discussion was concerned with Ali’s diasporic roots and the impact that this had on his writing. I

interviewed the director Horace Ové. Ové discussed his work on *Pressure* (Ové, 1975), *Empire Road* and *A Hole in Babylon* (1979, BBC1). More broadly, Ové talked about the challenges of being Britain's first black film director and the enabling role played by white producers such as Peter Ansorge. In my interview with Peter Ansorge, he discussed his collaboration with Ové on *Empire Road*. He also talked about working with playwright Michael Abbensetts on *Black Christmas* (1977, BBC2), and his work on the controversial series *Gangsters* (1976-78, BBC1). Ansorge highlighted the collaborative nature of television production and gave an insight into informal networks of white and black practitioners in the 1970s period. In my interview with the producer Graham Benson, he discussed his collaboration with Ové on *A Hole in Babylon*. Benson gave an important insight into the enabling role that producers could play on politically 'risky' projects. In my interview with the director Anthony Simmons, he discussed his work on *Black Joy* and his troubled collaboration with its screenwriter, Jamal Ali. Simmons revealed the way in which he had regarded Brixton 'as a magical world' onto which he could project his own East End Jewish ideas of 'home' and lost community. I interviewed audience members Stacy and Michael, on separate occasions at Brixton's Ritzy cinema. Stacy discussed watching *Black Joy* on the film's release – he compared the film to his experience of watching *Babylon* in Brixton's ACE cinema. Michael discussed his role as an extra on *Black Joy* and of subsequently watching the film in the ACE cinema. Both men provided important insights into community responses to a local Brixton film. Although the archives may be uneven and interview testimony must be interpreted judiciously (as the next section will acknowledge), the richness of primary source material has enabled new insights to be made about black creative agency in British film and television culture of this period.

1.3 - Methodology and structure

Introduction

Given that my research questions centre around complex issues of black creative agency, no single method of analysis is able to provide the necessarily nuanced picture of the struggles and negotiations that occur both in the production process itself and at the point of reception. For example, work that is wholly embedded in textual analysis of film or television is useful, but does not consider the impact of respective industrial contexts, nor is it concerned with the task of ‘disinter[ring] ... the input of a range of creative agencies’ on the finished product (Chapman et al., 2007, p.69). Likewise, interview material is invaluable to my study, especially in terms of capturing black creative voices and hidden histories that may have been hitherto obscured in other accounts of the decade. As Thompson reminds us: ‘oral [testimony] ... certainly can be a means of transforming both the content and purpose of history ... it can give back to the people who have made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place’ (Thompson, 1982, p.2).

Nevertheless, as I shall later go on to explain in detail, oral testimony is necessarily subjective, not least because memories are prone to ‘dislocations and disruptions that sever the possibility of [any] transparent relation to the past’ (Radstone, 2000, p.5). To this end, interview material, whilst providing rich data for the thesis, cannot be used in isolation.

In my section on sources, I outlined the diversity and richness of the archival texts that have been used in my study. However, there are numerous examples of

‘missing’ archival material, such as the lack of a surviving script or censor’s report for *Black Joy*, or documents pertaining to the production history of the black soap opera, *Empire Road*. Such ‘gaps’ may be in themselves significant and need careful negotiation on the part of the researcher. However, ‘missing’ documents do not pose the only limitation in dealing with archival sources for the purposes of this study. It must be remembered that my thesis has as its starting point, texts which are essentially embedded in the visual and verbal; the ‘look’ and ‘sound’ of films and television programmes are highly significant, especially in relation to emergent 1970s niche viewing (and listening) communities. Of course, as will be seen in my case study of *Babylon* (part 2.4), the archive (and the interview) can help to uncover much detail about music used in a particular film (see also Newland, 2010, p.98). Nevertheless, it is only in viewing electrifying scenes in *Babylon*, such as the scene when a desperate and defiant Blue ‘toasts’ *Can’t Take no More* in a crowded club, that we can perhaps begin to appreciate just how integral the authentic dub-reggae soundtrack is to the film.

As I will go on to discuss in more detail below, each methodological approach utilised has its own particular strengths and weaknesses and some, such as interviewing, pose distinct ethical challenges. However, to reiterate, none would work alone in a study of this nature. Indeed, to follow the sage advice of Saer Maty Ba and Will Higbee, an interdisciplinary framework must be used when dealing with the complexities of ‘how a diaspora imagines/represents itself, as well as how it is represented by the so-called host culture’ (2010, p.4). As Ba and Higbee assert, ‘diasporic representations’ on the screen have to be seen through the lens of disciplines such as sociology and ‘historical archival studies’ in order that they be fully contextualised and understood (2010, p.4).

Historiography

James Clifford argues in *Routes – Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, that vicissitudes in culture, migration and diaspora can perhaps best be envisioned in terms of ‘an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations (1997, p.11). Clifford reminds us that ‘all broadly meaningful concepts [and] terms are in themselves ‘built from imperfect equivalences’ and that the researcher must intersect disciplinary and genre boundaries in order to glimpse those ‘overlapping experiences marked by different ... terms: diaspora, borderland, immigration, migrancy ... [and] exile’ (1997, p.11). Clifford’s eclectic approaches in dealing with diverse historical sources, cultural artefacts and broader questions of anthropology are then, useful to my study. Especially helpful is Clifford’s understanding of his own mixed methodology (and writing genres) as a dynamic ‘collage’:

The purpose of my collage is not to blur, but rather to juxtapose, distinct forms of evocation and analysis. The method of collage asserts a relationship among heterogeneous elements in a meaningful ensemble. It brings its parts together while sustaining a tension among them ... A method of marking and crossing borders (here those of scholarly expression) is pursued ... Discursive domains, like cultures, are shown to be constituted at their policed and transgressive edges (Clifford, 1997, p.12).

That Clifford conceives of interdisciplinarity as analogous to border crossings, replete with inherent tensions, is highly pertinent to my study. It is only by recourse to different types of evidence and a range of academic disciplines and methodologies that we can begin to uncover what could be termed as history’s ‘transgressive edges’; those ‘fuzzy’ contested, discursive/cultural intersections that are perhaps, sites of creative production and social and political change. How else to position and

interrogate texts as seemingly disparate as *Love Thy Neighbour* and *A Hole in Babylon*? How else to minutely dissect the disputed authorship (and subsequent Brixton reception) of *Black Joy*? Clifford's approach then, recognises (and indeed celebrates) the fragmented nature of his sources and evidence. 'What is gathered here [in *Routes*]', Clifford tells us, 'are paths, *not* a map' [my emphasis] (1997, p.11).

The question of how to interpret and critically interrogate the fragments left by history is at the heart of Daniel Lord Smail's article 'Beyond the great divide' (2009). Smail reminds us that history is 'a quest to uncover things we do not know and perhaps can never fully know' (2009, p.22). Smail posits that it is only in the layering of different types of evidence, 'the practice of consilience', that we can begin to uncover, if not truth, 'a more robust understanding of something that went before' (2009, p.23):

To the pot shards, texts and phonemes ... we have added genes, isotopes and traces. Imagine each as a filter of different colour. Using just one, you see your subject in an unreliable light. But now layer them one on top of the other and peer through the ensemble and, if you do so, the bright light of the original can be reconstituted to some degree (Smail, 2009, p.23).

It is possible to argue therefore, that in terms of historiography (although only concerned with a single decade) my study can be seen to be in line with the writings of the 'Annales School'. Arguably, Clifford's insistence on an interdisciplinary approach is broadly in line with the proponents of the 'Annales School' who argue that in order to provide what they term as 'a sense of total history', a vast range of disciplines, such as sociology, law and social policy, and geography should be drawn on (Burke, 1992, p.xv). Furthermore, the work of the 'Annales' historians is especially relevant to this thesis as it denotes a shift away from a more 'formal' *history* which aims to provide a 'grand narrative' of 'historical facts' to *histories*. In

this way, ‘all aspects of society’ are treated by the historian as a ‘part of historical reality’ (Green and Troup, 1999, p.88). The Annales School’s insistence on allowing for previously overlooked elements of lived experience such as ‘modes of feeling’ to become ‘the object of serious historical research’ is seemingly at the heart of Smail’s debate concerning the unearthing of ‘deep history’ (Glenisson cited in Green and Troup, 1999, p.87; Smail, 2009, p.22).

Analysing film and television

The methodology utilised in this thesis for the analysis of film, follows that espoused by the New Film Historians such as Sue Harper, Mark Glancy, James Chapman and Jeffrey Richards. According to James Chapman, there is a need for ‘contextual as well as textual analysis of film’ (2005, p.11). In this way, it is argued that it is only possible to ‘read’ a film after the ‘historical circumstances of production and reception have been established’ (Chapman, 2005, p.11). Understandably, the New Film Historians are solely concerned with film. One obvious reason for this is that there are key differences between film and television texts in several aspects, such as production and reception, for example. However, a broadly similar approach to the analysis of television is recommended by Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacey and Madeleine Macmurrough-Kavanagh (2000). Bignell et al. stress the need for ‘a critical fusion between ‘industry and academic approaches’ when analysing television texts (2000, p.3). To this end, emphasis is placed on archival research and interviews with practitioners as well as textual analysis. This then, is the approach taken in my study. I deploy a range of critical approaches to the analyses of film and television texts, including considerations of genre, representation, narrative, visual

style and performance. But I also remain mindful that during the 1970s, television and film fared differently economically, and that textual deconstruction cannot be abstracted from the cultural economy in which work was produced and understood. In short, we need to be aware of the economic base determining the cultural superstructure. The 1970s were a time of ‘expansion and development for British television’ whereas the British film industry was suffering a funding crisis (Medhurst, 2006, p.40). Although I am anxious to avoid the rather simplistic notion of a ‘golden age of television’ versus a film industry in terminal decline, it is nonetheless true that the feature films concerned with black Britain in the 1970s discussed in my study are low-budget. It is, then, important that we ask questions about the relations between institutions and black creative agency when looking at the financing of films and television programmes concerned with representations of black Britain during the 1970s.

Approaching visual style

My study pays attention to the visual style of both film and television texts. As Sue Harper and Vincent Porter (2005, p.5) have pointed out, visual style differs in film and television, largely due to the ways in which the two industries are structured (although as previously mentioned, the 1970s allowed for a degree of ‘crossover’ in terms of practitioners from both genres). A key difference in visual style between the film and television texts that I explore in this study is that many of the television programmes are largely studio-bound (although there are notable exceptions such as *A Hole in Babylon*). Nevertheless, in the television plays that I examine, there is a predominance of what Kobena Mercer (1988) has termed a ‘documentary realist

aesthetic'. The films also retain large elements of this aesthetic. They were shot on location and their aesthetic is characterised by hand-held mobile camerawork and the intimate framing of street life, natural or minimal lighting, and an impression of subjectivity. However, it is important to examine challenges to the documentary realist aesthetic in both forms. In film, *Pressure*'s 'dream sequence' and the blaxpotation elements of *Black Joy* perhaps subvert the overall documentary realist aesthetic of the texts. More explicitly, television texts such as *In the Beautiful Caribbean* (1972, BBC1) and *Black Feet in the Snow* completely eschew a documentary realist aesthetic.

In my textual analysis of visual style, I note tensions in discourse between performance and location and the script. This is particularly noticeable in *Black Joy* (see part 2.4 of this thesis), but can also be seen in *The Fosters* (1976-77, LWT) where strong ensemble performances elevated the script to some extent. In the case of *Black Joy*, marketing materials have a key impact on the way in which the film was 'read' by audiences and must be taken into consideration when analysing visual style. Moreover, the role of music, in both film and television, plays an important part in my analysis. Reggae music, a key site of black artistic expression and political resistance, is an integral part of the narrative in *Babylon* and *Pressure*, as it is in *A Hole in Babylon*. This was clearly perceived by practitioners and audiences alike to add 'authenticity' to a text; *Black Joy*'s soul soundtrack, on the other hand, contributed heavily to the film's perceived 'inauthenticity' to local black audiences.

Reading performance

The role of performance in television and film texts concerning black Britain in the 1970s is important and cannot be overlooked. As was the case with television and

film, there were significant levels of crossover between the two genres and the burgeoning radical black theatre scene. Indeed as will be demonstrated throughout this study, numerous black actors moved between black theatre and film and television during the period. Colin Chambers has stated that the fact that black theatres in the 1970s were forced to ‘create space on the margins’ actually contributed to a period of innovation and creativity:

For African-Caribbean theatre in Britain, the rise of black consciousness ... reinvigorated the struggle for self-assertion artistically ... fuelled by its status as other and engendered despite and because of lack of resource, franchise and access, the dynamic of black theatre carried a new sense of pride and even swagger (Chambers, 2011, p.137).

As Keir Elam has argued, radical black theatre placed an emphasis on the ‘carnival rhythms and masquerade modes’ of black performance (1995, p.183). Given the level of practitioner crossover during the 1970s, such concerns with black ‘performativity’ evidently filtered through to (some) film and television texts. This can clearly be seen in the work of black practitioners working in 1970s film and television, including Jamal Ali, the playwright Michael Abbensetts and the director Horace Ové. Indeed, the actor Norman Beaton wrote about the unique way in which Ové directed the black soap opera, *Empire Road*: ‘Horace ... persuaded his actors to invest their performances with the broad black and West Indian attitudes, body movement and gaiety which in other circumstances they may have felt too inhibited to portray’ (Beaton, 1986, p.214).

As this extract illustrates, performance is strongly linked to creative agency and as such, it raises many questions: Under what circumstances would black actors feel inhibited? How important is ‘authentic’ black performance in terms of reception? Can black performances (such as those described by Elam, and elicited by Ové) help to transform a film or television text which is deemed ‘inauthentic’ at the level of the

script? To what extent, if any, is ‘authentic black performance’ stifled in the face of commercial or industrial constraints? These debates and others are addressed in my study using a range of textual analysis, interviews and archival sources.

Interpreting the archives

My collection of material from a range of archives has allowed me to amass vital data concerning the production, reception and exhibition histories of 1970s films and television programmes, and also how such texts were critically received. Further archival material (outlined in my section on Sources), has enhanced my understanding of the role of black theatre, the ‘mapping’ of sites of black creativity, and the ways in which black communities (especially in London) were socio-politically situated during the decade. Indeed, such archival contextualisation is vital for a study of this kind.

Nevertheless, there are certain methodological and ethical issues to be considered in relation to the archive. As previously mentioned, one of the key problems that I have encountered is the patchiness of evidence pertaining to 1970s film and television. Of course, we can never fully know why documents are missing. Michael Hill argues that in some cases, institutions may simply not recognise the usefulness of certain material to academic research – they may discard what they regard as ‘ephemera’ rather than donate it to an archive (Hill, 1993, p.4). It is possible that this is the case with *Empire Road* – certainly no documents pertaining to this programme were passed on to the BBC Written Archives at Caversham (or any other archive) prior to the demolition of the BBC Pebble Mill Studios in 2005.

Furthermore, Hill states that even when material *does* reach the archive, it may have been ‘filleted’ or ‘cleaned up’ by others (or the individual concerned) prior to donation (1993, p.19). Hill lists various explanations as to why this can happen: ‘personal machinations and idiosyncrasies, family sensibilities, professional envy ... organizational mandates, bureaucratic decisions ... or institutional [sensitivities]’ (Hill, 1993, p.19). Moreover, archives themselves are not ‘neutral’ and decisions are necessarily made regarding what data is kept for posterity: ‘archives mirror the societies in which they are embedded. The papers of ... institutionally powerful people are far more likely to be [housed] ... by archives than [those] of ‘lesser’ men and women’ (Hill, 1993, p.17).

The privileging of the papers of certain institutionally powerful people by archivists is especially pertinent in the context of my study, dealing as it does with black creative agency and marginalised communities. An instructive example of this can perhaps be seen in the National Theatre’s ‘Black British Theatre’ database, which lists only two of Jamal Ali’s plays. We can only speculate then, why certain documents are missing from the archive. In this way, we need to be mindful of Hill’s comments that archives, despite their undisputed value to the researcher, ultimately only provide what he terms as ‘selective traces’ of the past (1993, p. 19). The fragmented nature of archival evidence pertaining to film and television of the 1970s then, poses distinct methodological challenges. In part 2.3, I discuss the detailed audience and institutional correspondence concerning *Love Thy Neighbour*. This is rich data which has yielded some complex and unexpected findings. However, given that this is the only dialogue of its kind that I have been able to find, it is not possible to ascertain whether responses to *Love Thy Neighbour* were analogous to other popular (but equally controversial) shows of the decade.

As previously mentioned, there are ethical issues to be addressed when dealing with archival evidence. Given that this study is concerned with sensitive issues of race relations, I have had to deal with inflammatory or even racist material. In the case of the *Love Thy Neighbour* correspondence, I chose not to give a verbatim record of a couple of overtly racist letters that some members of the public had written; instead I simply gave an overview of their content. Furthermore, I withheld the addresses (and full names) of all of the members of public who had corresponded with the IBA in order to protect those still living and their families.

Finally, as Hill argues, our intellectual ‘activities [as researchers] in archives are ... [never] wholly systematic’ (1993, p.6). In other words, all archival research is dependent on selections (and omissions) that researchers make, and is therefore necessarily subjective. In this way, whilst I have been rigorous in my analysis of archival evidence, I am nonetheless aware that I have prioritised certain documents over others (as the *Love Thy Neighbour* correspondence illustrates, for example). These choices have moulded my research to some extent.

Oral history methods

Interviews comprise an important element of this study. My interviewees are broadly in two categories: those I term ‘practitioners’ and those I term ‘audience members’ (although in the case of an audience member who was also an extra on *Black Joy*, there is a blurring of these categories). Whilst interviews are extremely useful in tracing black creative agency, recovering production and reception histories, and for socio-political and geographical/spatial contextualisation, it is necessary to be mindful of certain methodological and ethical issues. Firstly as

Berkhofer states, ‘uses of memories raise the problematic relationship between memory and history and exemplify the difficulties of applying the traditional maxims of evaluating sources as evidence’ (2008, p.142). Indeed, Radstone reminds us that memories are complicated ‘productions’ which are shaped and ‘related in complex ways to the dialogic moment of their telling’ (2000, p.11). The subjective (and situated) nature of memories, then, can render them as problematical as historical sources (Berkhofer, 2008, p.43). These issues are especially pertinent to my research; the majority of my interviewees were over retirement age, and, moreover, I was asking them to recall events that happened over thirty years ago. However, as Radstone asserts, memories, whilst prone to ‘condensations and displacements’, are categorically not ‘fiction’ (2000, p.11). Nevertheless, memories are subject to factual and temporal lapses and are ‘replete with absences [and] silences’ (Radstone, 2000, p.11). Citing the work of Luisa Passerini (1983), Radstone argues that paradoxically, the strength of oral data as a source lies in this very liminality – ‘silences and forms of forgetting’ are in themselves telling (Radstone, 2000, p.12). Uncovering personal ‘re-memberance[s]’, Radstone states, are central to illuminating both the emotional narrative[s] of the individual and the ‘cultural and historical formation’ of the ‘collective’ (2000, p.13). In this way, my own interview data is essentially approached as ‘discourse, as material for interpretation’ (Khun, 2002, p.9). Given that my study is primarily a cultural history, I would argue that this approach to data collection and analysis is instructive to my research. Furthermore, parallel contemporaneous research on my part allows for a degree of triangulation. This approach can be seen throughout my thesis and is especially apparent in part 3.4. Here I utilise rich interview data from Jamal Ali, Anthony Simmons and *Black Joy*’s audience members whilst incorporating relevant

archival material and textual analysis. I therefore take a ‘middle-ground’ approach to my interview data which allows for the importance of the ‘unspoken’ or the ‘non-literal’ whilst necessarily mindful of other sources of evidence.

Ethical considerations

bell hooks has written about the dangers of essentialist categorisation of people on the grounds of gender, sexuality or race (hooks, 1993, p.425). For hooks, it is only when we employ a ‘critique of essentialism’ that we can begin to ‘affirm multiple black identities [and] varied black experiences’ (1993, p.425). Whilst I am obviously in agreement with hooks about the importance of a non-essentialising approach in research, there is little denying that, on the surface at least, I am not in the same group/category as the people that I have interviewed for my study. With the exception of three interviewees (Anthony Simmons, Graham Benson and Peter Ansorge), my interviewees were black, and all were male, and all were older than me. As some of the key aims of my research were to map black creative agency, and to explore issues of diasporic identity and representation, I have had to consider that I could face criticism on the grounds that ‘it is difficult for outsiders to capture the experiences of [ethnic] minorities’ (Carby cited in Walseth, 2006, p.81). Perhaps more importantly, I have had to consider that in telling these stories, I could face accusations that I (and here I am mindful of George Lamming’s (1984) work concerning black creative agency, *The Pleasures of Exile*) may be guilty of (re)colonising another’s history. These are complex and important ethical issues

and, to this end, I have been strongly influenced by the methodological approaches taken by Kristen Walseth and Ann Oakley.

Although sociologist Kristen Walseth's research is not concerned with black Britain in the 1970s, many of the issues that she discusses are pertinent to my work.

Walseth's study involved interviews with young Muslim women living in Norway.

As such, the women constituted a minority ethnic group, whereas Walseth came from a 'majority background'; this mirrors my own position as an interviewer (Walseth, 2006, p.82). Walseth was mindful of the 'categoricalist' position, which states that 'one can only do research on individuals who belong to the same group/category as oneself' (2006, p.81). One of the key reasons given for this position is that any other form of interviewer/interviewee relationship could maintain 'existing power relationships' (2006, p.81). Walseth, however, argued that 'researcher reflexivity' could mitigate some of these problems. One of the approaches that she used was to allow interviewees to read and edit their interview transcripts (Walseth, 2006, p.81). Walseth also stated the importance of 'shared knowledge' in an interview situation; for her this comprised a study of Islam, which enabled her to gain the trust of her interviewees (2006, p.82). As she argued, 'shared knowledge' is far more useful than 'simplistic' pairings of 'race and/or gender' of interviewees or interviewers (2006, p.82). Following Walseth then, I have also placed emphasis on the importance of 'shared knowledge in the interview situation. Each interview was painstakingly prepared for, and where necessary, I used 'prompts' such as contemporaneous photographs to further facilitate conversation, understanding and trust between interviewer and interviewee. In line with Walseth, I provided interviewees with transcripts of their interviews and encouraged their feedback and comments. Walseth's notions of 'researcher reflexivity' and her

defence of the importance of ‘shared knowledge’ are then, uppermost in my own research practice.

Similarly, the feminist sociologist Ann Oakley underlines the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher and I have drawn strongly on her approach. Whilst it may seem unusual to have used feminist methodology when interviewing men, it is my contention that Oakley’s concern with the non-hierarchical role of the researcher, her notion of research as interviewer/interviewee ‘joint participation’, and her overarching concern that neither interviewees or the information that they provide should be exploited in any way, is deeply relevant when interviewing minority groups whose voices have been previously overlooked or misrepresented, whatever their gender (Oakley, 1990, pp.48-58). As Oakley writes, research participants should not be treated as ‘objects or data-producing machines’ (1990, p.37). Indeed, Oakley argues that participants should be regarded as fully-acknowledged research partners/collaborators. I have aimed to take this approach with all of my interviewees, but perhaps this is most apparent in my research collaboration with Jamal Ali. As Perks and Thomson have written, ‘oral history ... can be used to empower individual narrators’ (2008, p.xi). In the case of Ali, both his work and life story had been heavily overlooked – with the notable exception of Colin Chambers’ *Black and Asian Theatre in Britain* (2011), he had effectively been written out of history. Here, the co-production of data took place in the interview setting, with further meetings instigated by Ali himself.

Other recent (and welcome) trends in social research strongly echo both Walseth’s and Oakley’s sentiments. Bruce Macfarlane for example, urges us to ‘live out research virtues’; at the heart of this lies a researcher reflexivity which foregrounds virtues such as respectfulness and humility (2009, p.5). At the heart of the

aforementioned authors' writings on research methodology then, are notions of respect and consent; I have remained mindful of this in my own reflexive interviewing practice.

Structure

This thesis provides an examination of relations between black film and television texts and the social, political and institutional contexts of their authorship. The key focus of my study is on black creative agency – the 'mapping' of black creative voices. To this end, my thesis is structured in two parts. In Part 2, I 'map the field' socio-politically and then provide a survey of the significant range of feature films and fictional television programmes concerned with black Britain in the 1970s (2.1 and 2.2 of this thesis). I then go on to give three case studies – 2.3 *Love Thy Neighbour*, 2.4 *Babylon*, and 2.5 *A Hole in Babylon*. The case studies have been chosen for their variety of genre and form (a sitcom, a feature film, and a single play) and because they offer valuable insights into production and reception histories. I do not claim that this is an exhaustive or wholly representative selection, but the case studies highlight the vital importance of researching production and reception contexts in understanding the nature of black interventions in the 1970s. Furthermore, they demonstrate the usefulness of the imaginative interpretation of archival and original interview material in reappraising film and television texts. As such, they provide an exemplar of the approach taken, and the concern and focus of Part 3 of this thesis. In Part 3, then, using the same methodological approach, I place the texts themselves at the foreground in order to enable an applied study of creative agency – the creative journey of the poet and playwright Jamal Ali, who

worked in radical black theatre, film and television in the 1970s. In 3.1, I outline Ali's work in performance poetry and radical black theatre within the community context of Brixton. I then discuss the way in which his stage play, *Black Feet in the Snow* was adapted for the BBC 2 *Open Door* strand and examine the creative collaboration between Ali and the BBC director, Brian Skilton (part 3.2). In part 3.3, I explore a further adaptation of Ali's work – the politically-didactic stage play *Dark Days, Light Nights* (1975) for the feature film *Black Joy*. I examine Ali's problematic collaboration with the director Anthony Simmons, which had its basis in the two men's conflicting ideas of Brixton as 'home' and 'community'. I also look at the role of the film's American producer, Elliott Kastner, who appears to have regarded *Black Joy* as a British blaxploitation film. In part 3.4, I examine the local response to the screening of *Black Joy* in Brixton. In uncovering the reception history of the film, I am able to further explore complex notions of black creative agency and geographical spaces of self-expression. Whilst my study is methodologically rigorous and multidisciplinary in nature, it does not aim to be exhaustive or all-encompassing in its cultural map. I have made discrete choices in the selection of texts in order to pursue a particular focus on the contested nature of authorship. However, I wish to explore and 'map' the complex nature of black creative agency in the period – to pursue a 'deep' history which allows for the re-evaluation of particular texts. To that end, a two-part structure serves that discrete purpose.

PART 2 – MAPPING THE FIELD

2.1 – Mapping the Field 1: Socio-political context

Introduction

In this section, I will outline the socio-political context of British race relations in the 1970s. Arguably, this is of key importance to understanding the texts discussed throughout this thesis. Of course, as Chapman, Glancy and Harper rightly assert, cultural texts do not act as ‘a [simple] reflection or mirror of society’ (2007, p.3). Certainly the television programmes and films that I am exploring cannot be looked at within a naïve reflectionist model. Nevertheless, I will argue that it is inconceivable that texts concerning the highly-politicised Black Britain of the 1970s can be discussed without prior knowledge of the socio-political context of the period in which they were made and shown. Moreover, the number and range of black film and television texts produced in Britain in the 1970s is itself a function of the urgency of the socio-political situation. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, ‘radical’ television programmes such as *Black Feet in the Snow* and *A Hole in Babylon*, and films such as *Babylon* and *Pressure*, drew on the experiences of black communities in London. These texts are directly concerned with the lives of black people in Brixton, Deptford and Ladbroke Grove. As such they deal with social factors such as racism, education, employment, policing and urban deprivation. However, popular if ‘reactionary entertainments’ such as *Love Thy Neighbour*, also require an understanding of the socio-political context. As I demonstrate in part 2.3, letters written by *Love Thy Neighbour*’s viewers’ show how the programme was used to negotiate ideas of race. In the same way, an awareness of the socio-political context allows for an understanding of why *Black Joy* was such a heavily-contested

film (see part 3.4). In this way, the socio-political conditions of the 1970s helped to shape both the production and the reception of texts concerned with 'Black Britain'. Whilst my study is primarily concerned with the 1970s, no period in history can be seen in isolation. It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed history of Britain's race relations including its involvement with slavery and colonialism. But, to follow Peter Fryer, I remain mindful of these aspects of Britain's past in order to gain insight into the problematic history of race relations in Britain. As Fryer compellingly argues:

Black slave labour on sugar plantations in the West Indies was British industry's springboard. And racism not only justified plantation slavery and, later colonialism but also poisoned the lives of black people living in Britain. It is still doing so. [To not consider this past] ... would be like a history of the Jews in Germany that stayed silent about anti-semitism and extermination camps (Fryer, 1987, p.xii).

For Fryer, slavery is at the root of racism in Britain; it led to the discursive positioning of black people as 'second-class citizens' and as something 'other' (Fryer, 1987, p.xii). In this way, the Caribbean novelist, George Lamming, summed up the way in which his knowledge of Britain's past slave-trade and colonialism made his 'exile' to 1970s London somewhat problematic: 'When the exile is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country that colonised his own history, then there are certain complications' (Lamming, 1984, p.24).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the connection with slavery and/or colonialism lies at the heart of many 1970s film and television texts considered in this thesis. An obvious example is the highly popular British airing of the American TV series *Roots*.

However, the 'dream sequence' at the end of the feature film, *Pressure*, finds the key protagonist at an English stately home, facing up to the connotations of colonialism and slavery (see part 2.2). More explicitly, in the televised version of *Black Feet in*

the Snow, images of slavery are superimposed onto the bodies of dancers (see part 3.2).

As John Solomos reminds us then, ‘immigration and race were contested issues long *before* the arrival of large numbers of black colonial immigrants [to Britain] from [1948 onwards]’ (Solomos, 2003, p.48). In short, Britain’s history of slavery and colonialism cast a long shadow over the discourse surrounding the so-called Windrush arrivals of the late 1940s and continued to do so throughout the 1970s (and beyond). I will begin this section with a brief overview of some key events and policies pertaining to race relations in Britain in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Arguably, the events of these decades, allied with the more distant history of slavery, paved the way for the deeply turbulent race relations of the 1970s.

Given the foregrounding of the relationship between history and cultural texts, my subsequent focus on the socio-political context of 1970s race relations will be thematic in nature. Firstly I will discuss race relations policy and legislation. Secondly I will look at education and employment. Thirdly I will explore the problematic relationship between the police and black communities (with a key focus on London). Finally I will consider the so-called ‘crisis’ of London’s inner city and its disproportionate impact on black communities. Throughout, emphasis will be placed on Brixton as a key site of cultural production and reception.

Race Relations in Britain 1948 – 1969

Following the Second World War, Britain was faced with chronic labour shortages (Sivanandan, 1987, p.101). Although around ‘half a million refugees, displaced persons or prisoners of war were admitted to Britain between 1946 and 1951’ the Ministry of Labour still found it necessary to recruit workers from other parts of Europe (Sivanandan, 1987, p.101). It has been estimated that between 1945 and 1947, around 350 000 European nationals migrated to Britain but this still left significant gaps in the labour market (Sivanandan, 1987, p.101). However, as Sivanandan has argued, Britain was also able to exploit the ‘source of labour in its colonies and ex-colonies in Asia and the Caribbean’:

Unlike most other European countries ... Britain [could] turn to an alternative and comparatively un-competitive source of labour ... Colonialism had already under-developed these countries and thrown up a reserve army of labour which now waited in readiness to serve the needs of the metropolitan economy ... It [was] ... to these vast and cheap sources of labour that Britain turned to ... (Sivanandan, 1987, p.102).

This process was made relatively simple by dint of the fact that ‘the vast majority of British subjects in the colonies and dominions had the legal right to enter and settle in Britain’ (Solomos, 2003, p.51). Moreover, the 1948 British Nationality Act ‘granted United Kingdom citizenship to citizens of Britain’s colonies and former colonies’ (Fryer, 1987, p.373). In this way, on June 22 1948, 492 Jamaicans arrived at Tilbury docks on the *Empire Windrush* (Fryer, 1987, p.372). As Fryer states, ‘the door stood open’ and ‘British industry quickly absorbed them’ (1987, p.373). Nevertheless, over the next five years, ‘West Indian’ migration to Britain was significantly less than migration from the Republic of Ireland during the same period (Fryer, 1987, p.372; Solomos, 2003, p.52). By 1958, ‘West Indian’ migration to Britain stood at around 125 000 but this figure was still only a third of the number of European nationals who had migrated to the UK (Fryer, 1987, pp. 372-373). It should also be noted that from the early 1950s, ‘rural workers from India and

Pakistan' also migrated to Britain under the aegis of the Nationality Act (Fryer, 1987, p.373). By 1958, around 55 000 Asians had settled in Britain; again a small figure when compared to European or Irish migrants (Fryer, 1987, p.373).

Cashmore and Troya have asserted that between 1948 and 1957, British government had 'a *laissez-faire* approach to immigration' insofar as it did not 'interfere with the flow of migration from the Commonwealth' (1983, p.47). There seems to have been some degree of party political consensus that immigration could be left to market forces (Solomos, 2003, p.53). Indeed, the publicly-owned London Transport 'actively recruited' in Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica from 1956 onwards (Fryer, 1987, p.373). Workers were loaned their fares to London and these were paid back in small instalments (Fryer, 1987, p.373). However, Solomos has argued that during this period, there was actually 'intense debate' in 'government departments' and the media 'about the impact of *black* immigration' (2003, p.54). This was despite the fact that they were British subjects (2003, p.54):

The relatively liberal attitude towards the arrival of European workers contrasted sharply with the fears expressed about the perceived social and racial problems that would arise with the arrival of 'coloured' colonial workers ... Both the Labour governments of 1945-51 and the Conservative governments of the 1950s considered various ways of stopping ... black migration [to Britain] (Solomos, 2003, p.52).

Evidently concerns were raised about housing shortages, the impact of black migration on the welfare state and 'black crime' (Solomos, 2003, p.54). Indeed, Darrell Newton has pointed out that *Pathe News*, whilst initially offering a 'welcoming and positive narrative' about the Windrush arrivals, began to problematise black immigration in subsequent reports (Newton, 2011, p.5). By the mid-1950s, *Pathe* included news items 'labelled *Our Jamaican Problem*' which linked increased black immigration to issues such as unemployment and

overcrowding (Newton, 2011, pp.4-5). Moreover, an insidious discourse concerned with 'maintaining the English way of life' began to permeate public and private circles during this period (Solomos, 2003, p.54). As Solomos asserts: 'the debates on black immigration during the 1950s reinforced a racialised construction of Britishness that excluded or included people on the ground of race, defined by colour' (2003, p.54).

Many black people who settled in Britain in the 1950s found life difficult. Racism was rife and black workers found that they had to take jobs for which they were over-qualified (Fryer, 1987, pp. 374-375). Black families found themselves living in inferior or over-crowded housing as there was often a reluctance to rent homes to them (Fryer, 1987, p.375). In 1958, riots took place in Nottingham and London's Notting Hill, largely due to a high number of violent racist attacks perpetrated by Teddy boys (Sivanandan, 1987, p.9). Evidently, the police did little to protect black communities from racist attacks (Sivanandan, 1987, p.10). As Sivanandan has argued, the botched police investigation into the racially-motivated stabbing of a 'West Indian carpenter, Kelso Cochrane' in a Notting Hill street in 1959, seemed to confirm that the law was on the side of the white man (1987, p.10).

Although there was already a political dialogue concerning the 'control' of black immigration, this debate intensified following the 1958 riots (Solomos, 2003, p.53). The debate centred around the 'possibility of revising the 1948 Nationality Act' largely on the grounds that 'coloured immigrants' were responsible for an increase in crime and unemployment (Solomos, 2003, p.53). Whilst there was some opposition to this in both major political parties, by 1961 'a bill to control Commonwealth

immigration was introduced by the government' (Solomos, 2003, p.53). The resultant 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act meant that the majority of holders of Commonwealth passports were now subject to immigration control (Solomos, 2003, p.53). Many Commonwealth citizens could now enter Britain only if they were issued with a Ministry of Labour employment voucher (Fryer, 1987, p.381). As Fryer has argued, black people were now officially relegated to the position of 'immigrant' and 'to the permanent status of second-class citizens' (Fryer, 1987, p.381). For Fryer, the 1962 Act was the beginning of both political parties' 'surrender to racism' (1987, p.380). In the 1964 general election, the Conservative Peter Griffiths won the Smethwick seat after an openly racist campaign (Fryer, 1987, p.381). His infamous slogan was 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Labour' (cited in Fryer, 1987, p.382). Although Labour won the 1964 general election, Harold Wilson retained the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (Solomos, 2003, p.59). A year later, the Labour government called for even tighter controls on Commonwealth migration (Solomos, 2003, p.59).

It was not until 1965 that any attempt was made to combat racial discrimination through the use of policy (Cashmore, 1988, p.13). However, the 1965 Race Relations Bill was an ineffectual piece of legislation (Cashmore, 1988, p.13). Indeed, Fryer has stated that it was a mere 'sweetener' for the increasingly draconian immigration policies that followed (Fryer, 1987, p.383). The 1965 Bill outlawed racial discrimination 'in places of public resort', but it had no scope for protecting black people from racial discrimination in housing or work – arguably the very areas where it was most needed (Cashmore, 1988, p.13). The Bill did allow for the setting up of the Race Relations Board but the conciliation process required in the event of a

complaint was lengthy and complicated (Cashmore, 1988, p.13). It is perhaps unsurprising that the PEP (Political and Economic Planning) report of 1967 found that the 1965 Race Relations Bill had had little impact on the lives of ‘racial minority groups’ (Smith, 1977, p.13):

Racial minority groups faced a substantial amount of discrimination when seeking jobs and housing ... the [1967 report] also described some of the effects of this discrimination on the minority groups, who tended to live in very poor accommodation and be doing manual jobs that were below the level of their qualifications (Smith, 1977, p.18).

The findings of the 1967 PEP report, allied to broader concerns that the recent USA ‘race riots’ could be replicated in Britain, led to a realisation on the part of the Labour government that the 1965 Bill needed strengthening (Cashmore, 1988, pp.13-14). The subsequent 1968 Race Relations Act was extended to cover the ‘important spheres of housing and employment’ (Cashmore, 1988, p.14). However, the Race Relations Board was not granted extra powers under the Act (Cashmore, 1988, p.14). The Board remained a ‘reactive body’ rather than an investigative one, and continued to be mired in bureaucracy (Cashmore, 1988, p.14).

In March 1968, the Labour government passed a second Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968) (Solomos, 2003, p.60). This Act effectively barred ‘free entry to Britain of its citizens in Kenya’ (Sivanandan, 1987, p.23). Although Harold Wilson asserted that the rationale behind the 1968 Act was ‘geographical’ and not ‘racial’, Britain’s black communities were understandably ‘enraged’ (Sivanandan, 1987, p.23). Two weeks after the Act was passed, Enoch Powell gave his infamous ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in which he warned that blacks were ‘swarming all over the country’ and that their ‘outflow’ should be promoted (Sivanandan, 1987, p.24). As Sivanandan has argued, Powell’s racist speech was, in many respects, little more than a dynamic

continuum of the political rhetoric and policies that had preceded it (1987, p.24).

Whilst certain of Powell's peers sought to disassociate themselves from his overtly racist views, in the long-term, there was little in the way of a political backlash against his speech (Fryer, 1987, p.384). Both political parties continued to argue for the containment of black migration – a consensus that would cast a long shadow over the following decade.

Race Relations policy and legislation in 1970s Britain

The first half of the 1970s saw the implementation of the 1971 Immigration Act, which, with its controversial partiality clause, effectively denied black and Asian Commonwealth citizens the right to settle in Britain whilst granting their white counterparts British citizenship (Solomos, 1989, pp.55-56). The result, as Sarita Malik argues, was to position 'anti-black sentiment ... as a structured and official topic of political debate' (2002, p.15). In short, Britain's black communities were increasingly posited as a 'problem' by sections of the government and media. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts identified the way in which, during the first half of the 1970s, a moral panic about 'black crime', specifically mugging, took hold in the public imagination. Highly unrealistic newspaper reports comparing street crime in London to that of New York helped to foster the impression that black people were lawless and to be feared (1978, pp.50-51). Even the liberal press, while ostensibly more sympathetic towards black communities, did tend to place them within the broader discourse of 'crisis' (See Hall et al, 1978).

Throughout the decade, the National Front, a far-right, white-only political party, conducted highly vocal (and often violent) demonstrations in London and elsewhere,

in which ‘Asians and Afro-Caribbeans’ clashed with anti-fascist protesters (Sivanandan, 1987, pp.30-31). Popularity for the National Front reached its zenith in the mid-1970s. While support came predominantly from blue-collar workers, a number of teachers, prison officers and policemen were among its ranks (Fielding, 1981, p.55).

During this period, a new generation of young black Britons born and educated in the UK, were at the forefront of ‘black struggle’ against racism (Fryer, 1987, pp.386-393). Black resistance sometimes took the form of grassroots activism. Black supplementary schools (which will be discussed in more detail later in this section), black youth groups and black legal advice centres were set up by black communities as a direct response to the inherent racism found in ‘official’ institutions of the time (Sivanandan, 1987, pp.30-31). By the mid-1970s, politicians who were dissatisfied with existing legislation designed to ‘tackle racial discrimination’ (primarily the 1968 Race Relations Act), pressed for tighter policies, especially in employment and housing (Solomos, 1989, p.74). The resultant 1976 Race Relations Act heralded some important innovations, not least of which was the recognition that the law needed to protect individuals from ‘racial disadvantage brought about by systematic racism’ (Solomos, 1989, p.74). A further advance was that under the auspices of the 1976 Act, it was no longer necessary for individuals to go through the lengthy and ‘inefficient conciliation programmes’ required by the 1968 Act (Bleich, 2003, p.88). For the first time, ‘victims of discrimination’ could access civil courts or industrial tribunals directly (Bleich, 2003, p.88). Nevertheless, the 1976 Act contained significant loopholes – not least of which was that the police were exempted from it (see Race Relations [amendment] Act 2000, chapter 34, section 1).

The late 1970s also witnessed the growth of what Malik has termed the ‘Race Relations Industry’ (2002, p.16). This saw a push towards ‘various anti-racist interventions’ and greater multiculturalism (Malik, 2002, p.16). Multiculturalism placed emphasis on the celebration of Britain’s cultural and ethnic diversity (Malik, 2002, p.16). However, such initiatives generally provided ‘little more than a sugary façade to a very discriminatory reality’ and consequently came in for harsh criticism from sections of the black community (Malik, 2002, p.16). Perhaps the contradictory nature of attitudes towards race and race relations in the decade is best summed up by Schaffer’s insightful observation that ‘in the 1970s there was a degree of political consensus that both black and Asian immigration, as well as racism, needed to be contained (2010, p.113).

Education and Employment

By the mid-1970s, it was estimated that ‘two out of every five black people in Britain’ had been born in the UK (Fryer, 1987, p.387). The ‘second generation’ who were born, brought up and educated in Britain found, as the decade progressed, that this gave them little in the way of advantage in society. As Sally Tomlinson has written, during the 1970s, the education of ‘ethnic minority children’ especially those of ‘West Indian origin’ was vastly inferior to that of their white counterparts (1982, p.155). A disproportionate number of black children were pushed out of mainstream education altogether and drafted to ESN (Educationally Subnormal) schools – a practice that had begun in the 1960s (Husband, 1974, p.163). Tomlinson has argued that the practice of placing black pupils in ESN schools had its roots in ‘the history of colonialism and white beliefs about the [limited academic]

potential of black people' (1982, p.155). Such attitudes were evidently institutionalised within the educational system. Writing in 1974, the sociologist Charles Husband outlined the problem:

Those teachers who are less overtly racist but still unable to divest themselves of their submerged racist assumptions are just as dangerous [as overtly racist teachers], and much more easily found. It is this sort of unconscious racism within British education which made it possible for ESN schools to have ... [large numbers of] black pupils. To white educationalists it did not seem unreasonable that there should be an excessive number of black children in ESN for there was a lower expectation of their intellectual ability (Husband, 1974, p.163).

Unsurprisingly, many black parents fought against 'the categorisation of their children as underachieving' or having low IQs (Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). In London's Haringey, during the mid-1960s, a group of 'West Indian parents, teachers and the North London West Indian Association' began to campaign about the habitual dumping of black pupils in ESN schools. However, a subsequent appeal to the Race Relations Board in 1970 failed to stop the practice (Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). The placing of 'West Indian children in ESN schools' was deemed by the Board to be 'no unlawful act' (taken from Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). This ruling seemingly paved the way for placements on a widespread scale throughout the 1970s. Certainly by 1978, Europe Singh, writing for the radical black newspaper *Flame*, was moved to comment that:

black kids get a rough deal from the education system. [There is an] Abnormally high percentage of West Indian pupils in schools for the educationally maladjusted and educationally subnormal (virtually prison schools), a rejection of black culture and language leading to low self-image among black kids which in turn leads to resistance in learning and poor results (Singh, 1978, p.3).

In London and other cities in Britain during the 1970s, some of those black children who managed to escape placement in ESN schools, were subjected to the equally

controversial practice of ‘bussing’. Large numbers of black pupils were transported daily to selected (often failing) schools which were sometimes located miles away from their homes (Grubb, 1972, p.207). Such schools were regarded as ‘ghettos’ or ‘dumping grounds’ and, like ESN schools, drew considerable opprobrium from black parents (Grubb, 1972, p.207).

Even when black children were able to attend mainstream schools near to their homes, a significant proportion left without formal qualifications (Tomlinson, 1982, p.157). Perhaps this is unsurprising given the level of institutional racism within the education system throughout the 1970s. Charles Husband gave the example of a head of a London ‘multi-racial’ school who, despite considering himself to be highly progressive in his outlook, nevertheless made essentialist assumptions about the abilities of his black pupils:

[The Headmaster] told me with a degree of pride how good relationships were in his multi-racial school, and then proceeded to comment upon how the natural athleticism of his West Indian pupils compensated for their lesser academic abilities. His concern for his black pupils was real enough, but it was wedded to such a paternalistic viewpoint that he failed to see the injustice in *his* acceptance of their lesser academic performance, and *his* emphasis upon their athletic skills [emphasis in original] (Husband, 1974, p.163).

As Husband asserted, an overarching institutional ‘acceptance of apparent black [intellectual] inferiority’ acted as a ‘buffer against the inadequacies of the education’ provided to black pupils (Husband, 1974, p.163).

One grassroots response to this state of affairs was the setting up of ‘West Indian supplementary schools’ (Stone, 1985, p.171). As Maureen Stone has written, supplementary schools could be found in all large urban areas where West Indians came to settle in Britain (1985, p.171). The form that supplementary schools took varied. The more conservative followed the already established Caribbean practice

of ‘extra classes before and after school and at the weekends’ (Stone, 1985, p.171). Generally speaking, so-called ‘Saturday schools’ would primarily focus on improving ‘basic academic skills’ (Stone, 1985, p.172). In cases such as this, a group of parents would band together to ‘buy in’ extra tuition for their children, who would attend classes in church halls or community centres (Stone, 1985, p.174). As Stone has argued, Saturday schools were ‘tolerated’ by LEAs (Local Educational Authorities) albeit with certain provisos (1985, p.174). In short, LEAs would sometimes provide additional funding for Saturday schools if it could be proven that they were ‘fulfilling a specific need, such as building language skills’ (Stone, 1985, p.174). However, as the 1970s progressed ‘black militants and radical organisations’ began to set up supplementary schools that placed emphasis on black culture, history and heritage (Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). Among black radicals, there was a growing realisation that not only was the British education system failing black children academically, it was also denying their ‘black identity’ (Singh, 1979, p.6). In London, highly-politicised supplementary schools such as ‘the Kwame Nkrumah school’, the ‘Malcolm X Montessori Programme’, ‘Headstart’ and the ‘Marcus Garvey School’ were established by groups such as the BLF (Black Liberation Front) (Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). Radical supplementary schools were controversial (even among certain sections of the black community). Indeed, the reaction of Bonsu’s mother in *A Hole in Babylon*, to her son’s decision to teach in a supplementary school of this type, is highly negative (see part 2.5). Nevertheless, as Stone has asserted, throughout the 1970s there was a large degree of consensus among ‘West Indian’ parents that the [British] school system actively ‘reinforced and sanctioned racist views’ and that this was a situation that must change (1985, p.174).

A toxic cocktail of inequality in the education system, racism, and economic downturn meant that as the 1970s progressed, young black people found themselves disadvantaged in the employment market (Fryer, 1987, p.388). Between 1973 and 1976 unemployment rates among Britain's black population were double that of their white counterparts (Fryer, 1987, p.388). This situation was most marked in inner-city areas with high black populations. In September 1978, the radical black newspaper, *Flame* reported that 20% of Brixton's black youths aged 16-24 were unemployed (Singh, 1978, p.3). When black school-leavers did find work, many found, like their parents before them, that their opportunities within the job market were severely limited (Fryer, 1987, p.388). Reporting for PEP (Political and Economic Planning) in 1977, David Smith outlined several worrying trends in black employment patterns. He noted that black workers were concentrated in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs for which they were often overqualified (Smith, 1977, p.104). Black employees earned less than their white counterparts and were disproportionately overlooked for promotion (Smith, 1977, p.104). Additionally, they tended to do shift work and had to 'make about twice as many applications as whites before finding a job' (Smith, 1977, p.104). Smith concluded that: 'All of these findings suggest that racial discrimination is an important factor in this situation' (1977, p.104). Moreover, Trades Unions, who could have intervened, seem to have been largely apathetic about 'racial issues' in the workplace (Smith, 1977, p.194). As Smith commented: 'Unions at a local level have seldom made representations to management on behalf of minority groups or come forward with suggestions for positive policies' (1977, p.194).

The Police and black communities

The relationship between the police and black communities (especially in cities such as London) was already problematic before the 1970s. By the 1970s, there was some recognition within certain sections of the force, that relations between the police and black people needed to be improved. Throughout the decade, Bramshill Police College offered innovative and liberal police training which placed especial emphasis on good police/community relations (Mark, 1977, p.17). However, it is important to note that the college was designed with the elite officer in mind and that the majority of police recruits at this time received ‘on the job training’ from older colleagues who often simply passed on their own entrenched attitudes towards race relations (Humphry, 1972, p.196).

Contemporaneous letters and articles written by police officers in *The Police Journal* often reveal a highly conservative backlash against Bramshill’s so-called ‘liberal studies’ syllabus (which included sociology, philosophy and politics). A fairly typical editorial written in 1975 mocked Bramshill’s ‘conferences and seminars’ which, it argued, focussed on ‘social-worker-like duties’ to the detriment of law enforcement (‘Commentary’, 1975. p.1). In the same way, there is evidence to suggest that those police officers who chose to work in newly-formed community relations posts were regarded by their peers as low-status and ridiculed for being ‘liberals’ (Lambert, 1970, p.389; Humphry, 1972, p.197).

At the beginning of the 1970s, effort was being made in some quarters to recruit police officers from ‘minority groups’ (‘On Beat’, 1970, p.349). This initiative

seems to have been regarded with suspicion on both sides. John Lambert, writing for *Race Today* in 1970, argued that, given the already strained relationship that many black people had with the police, they were unlikely to wish to work for the force (1970, p.388). Lambert pointed out that in numerous areas of Britain, ‘police-coloured community relations had deteriorated’ (1970, p.338). In these circumstances, community loyalty and ‘peer pressure’ prevented potential recruits from joining up (Lambert, 1970, p.338). In short, Lambert concluded that it was only when relations improved with the police that black people would join the force in any significant numbers: ‘Coloured recruitment on any scale will be a *sign* of improving community race relations, not a cause of their improvement [original emphasis]’ (Lambert, 1970, p.389).

A 1970 article in *The Police Journal* concerning an Anglo/American conference about police/community relations, demonstrated polarised views between British and American delegates (‘On Beat’, 1970, p.349). In contrast to their American counterparts, ‘the general view of the British police contingent’ was that recruitment from ‘minority groups’ was not important to the forging of good police/community relations (‘On Beat’, 1970, p.349). Moreover, they strongly rejected the idea of positive discrimination (‘On Beat’, 1970, p.349). Instead, recruitment from ‘minority groups’ should happen on a gradual, organic basis (‘On Beat’, 1970, p.349). When, in August 1970, ‘London’s first Sikh PC’ joined the Metropolitan Police Force (Chopra, 1970, p.283), *The Police Journal* responded in the form of a cartoon. An officer on his beat, pausing to clean his torch with a cloth, encounters a dark-skinned police officer wearing a turban. The caption reads: ‘*You startled me! I was just giving my torch a rub and up you loomed!*’ (Cartoon, 1971, p.277). That

an official police journal would publish a cartoon equating a Sikh officer to a pantomime genie perhaps says much about racist attitudes held within the institution during this period.

The somewhat flawed attempts to improve police/community relations were further undermined by the deployment, in London, of the Special Patrol Group (SPG) (IRR, 1979, p.10). Created in 1965, the SPG was a centrally-based, mobile squad designed to police areas of 'high crime' ('Lewisham liaison', 1975, p.274). Towards the late 1960s, the SPG's function changed from being a 'police support anti-crime unit' to one largely concerned with 'stop and search activities' and the controlling of (largely racial) 'civil unrest' (IRR, 1979, p.10). Trained in riot control, the SPG travelled in vans, were authorised to set up road blocks and placed emphasis on 'detention and arrest' ('Lewisham liaison', 1975, p.274; IRR, 1979, p.10). Throughout the 1970s, the areas that the SPG targeted were those that housed the majority of London's black population, such as Brixton, Peckham, Lewisham, Tooting, Deptford, Hackney and Notting Hill (IRR, 1979, p.10). In common with most police officers working in London and other large cities, the SPG made ample use of the 'sus' law (The Vagrancy Act 1824, sect 4) ('Know your rights', 1979, p.3). As the radical black newspaper *Flame* wrote, this legislation gave the police carte blanche to 'stop, search or arrest you if they claim you were suspiciously hanging around and *might* have committed a crime'[original emphasis] ('Know your rights', 1979, p.3). There is ample evidence to suggest that the 'sus' laws were disproportionately used against black people. In April 1978, for example, the *South London Press* reported that: 'In a survey of South London magistrates courts ... 35 out of 38 defendants charged with "sus" were black' ('Scrap sus', 1978, p.1).

Described as a 'paramilitary heavy squad' by *Race Today* and as a 'police commando unit' by the Institute of Race Relations, the SPG were involved in controversial operations which often resulted in the arrest of black people on a 'mass scale' ('Brixton Specials', 1973, p.68: IRR, 1979, p.10). A report in *Race Today* gives some indication of the modus operandi favoured by the SPG: 'The SPG have been involved in a large number of incidents in Brixton, where they were recently cruising the streets in force. Their activities brought howls of protest alleging brutality, arbitrary arrests, deliberate provocation and harassment' ('Brixton Specials', 1973, p.68). The situation in Brixton was to worsen five years later, when, as the *South London Press* reported, '150 SPG officers, some uniformed, some plain clothed' set up a permanent base 'from a special HQ at Brixton Police Station' ('Special Patrol Group Sweeps', 1978, p.1). Throughout the 1970s, *Race Today* carried numerous interviews from people for whom the SPG's presence represented a constant invasion in their daily lives. This testimony from a young black man living in Lewisham is fairly representative:

To drive a car anytime in Lewisham or New Cross is a big joke, you might as well walk, and when you do that, you might as well stay inside ... I driving from Lewisham to New Cross and get stopped three times, the whole place full with road blocks, transit vans, police cars the lot – curfew in this town (taken from 'Lewisham liaison', 1975, p.274).

The SPG were loathed among London's black population and *Race Today* commented that their activities had 'greatly contributed to the 'open war ... between the police and the black community' ('Brixton Specials', 1973, p.68). Throughout the 1970s, the SPG refused to be called to account, despite infamous events such as the India House incident in Aldwych when officers shot dead two Pakistani protesters who had been brandishing toy guns, and the battering to death of the anti-

racism protester Blair Peach (IRR, 1979, p.11: Sivanandan, 1987, p.44). As Fryer has argued, it is unsurprising that the 1970s witnessed numerous ‘clashes’ between black youths and police (notably the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival), given ‘the harassment of black people in their meeting places’, ‘the over manning of public events’, police brutality, and the ‘treatment of victims of racial violence as if they were the aggressors’ (1987, p.393).

The ‘crisis’ of London’s inner city and its impact on black communities

Throughout the 1970s, there was a perception on the part of successive governments that London had, what was termed, an ‘inner city problem’ (Hall, 1981, p.1).

Certainly, the inner London boroughs where *Pressure*, *Babylon* and *Black Joy* were filmed all suffered well-documented multiple deprivations during the decade (Laurence and Hall, 1981, pp. 105-106). The planning expert, Peter Hall, provided a useful description of what this meant in practical terms to residents of inner London boroughs such as Lambeth:

the physical deterioration of houses, factories, shops and streets; the lack of opportunities in jobs, housing, shopping, education and leisure; the poor level of many public services; and underlying all this, the feeling that the whole area is going downhill and the most able and energetic and successful are leaving (Hall, 1981, p.3).

Kettle and Hodges have asserted that this degeneration had its roots in London’s post-war urban planning policies (1982, p.126). Patrick Abercrombie’s *Greater London Plan* of 1944 (which became the blueprint for subsequent planning policy) had broadly advocated the relocation of one million Londoners out of its crowded inner boroughs into purpose-built new towns and newly-expanded existing country towns (cited in Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.126). This policy of ‘emptying’ London’s congested inner areas continued apace in the following decades. It has

been estimated that by 1970, some 90 000 households had been involved in local authority sanctioned schemes facilitating the transference of London residents to towns (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.126). At the same time, ongoing slum clearance programmes meant that swathes of houses in areas such as Brixton, Deptford and Lewisham were demolished or boarded up (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, pp.126-127). An unforeseen consequence of the policy of relocation away from the city was that when it was allied with the various economic crises of the 1970s, substantial job losses ensued among professional, managerial and skilled blue-collar workers (Hall, 1981, p.1). In short, this meant that many of those who continued to live in the inner city boroughs were less affluent, unskilled workers or the unemployed (Hall, 1981, p.1). Given the disadvantages suffered by many black workers in the employment market, it is perhaps not surprising that this demographic included a significant black population (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.136). Notwithstanding the structural nature of London's inner city problem, Enoch Powell's 1968 speech helped to link the empirically disparate issues of inner city deprivation with increased immigration and 'racial problems' (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.91). Two weeks after Powell's speech, the Government introduced the Urban Programme (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.91). Laurence and Hall have argued that whilst this policy ostensibly sought to help Britain's ailing inner cities, it was largely an attempt to quell public concern about Powell's speech (1981, p.91). It is ironic then, that the Urban Programme, which placed emphasis on 'demonstrating positive action in immigrant areas', may have helped to propagate the belief that the 'inner city problem' was inextricably linked to race (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.100).

Whilst subsequent governments during the 1970s did seem to recognise that London's 'inner city problem' was multi-factorial in nature, there was little consensus among policy makers as to how it should be tackled (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.101). The early 1970s saw 'small area-based' interventions at local authority level, but these were largely ineffectual, given cuts in public spending and a lack of outside investment (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.94: Kettle and Hodges, 1981, p.128). It was not until Labour's 1977 white paper *Policy for the Inner Cities*, and the resultant 1978 Inner Urban Areas Act that emphasis was placed on 'economic revival' (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.95). In London, as a direct result of the Act, Docklands, Hackney-Islington and Lambeth were placed in Central/Local Government Partnership Programmes (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.129). This enabled the local authorities in question to get central government support for projects such as 'site clearance' and 'factory provision' (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.129). However, in practice, this new approach was problematic as few local authorities actually invested the government funds into innovative programmes designed to 'encourage economic revival' (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.95). Instead, partnership monies were often diverted towards leisure and transport (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.95). This was the case with Lambeth's local authority which, despite high levels of unemployment, derelict factories and houses, chose to spend £575 000 on the Lambeth Walk swimming pool and £870 000 on the Kennington lido (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.129).

Despite numerous policies designed to aid London's inner city areas, it seemed that little was actually changed by them (Laurence and Hall, 1981, p.109). In practical terms, low wages, unemployment, a shortage of quality housing and a lack of

consistent investment meant that poorer people living in inner city boroughs found themselves vying for scarce resources throughout the 1970s (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.128). This was particularly marked in the housing sector. An example of this can be seen in the borough of Lambeth which, by the late 1970s, was estimated to be '20 000 dwellings short of the target of a separate home for every household' (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.143). Some 18 000 households in the borough were on the council waiting list for social housing (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.143). What is clear is that black communities generally lost out in the competition for resources. David Smith's report for PEP in 1977 found that 'West Indians' were much less likely to be offered council accommodation than their white counterparts (1977, p.221). As in the past, this maintained a high incidence of private renting of insecure and/or dilapidated housing within black communities (Smith, 1977, 221).

Somewhat predictably then, by 1979, the number of homeless black families in Lambeth was almost double that of the white community (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.143).

Life in areas such as Lambeth became even tougher after Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government was elected in May 1979. Black communities, already disadvantaged by tough immigration laws and the negative discourses which surrounded them, now also had to contend with New Right policies on Britain's inner cities. Under the Conservatives, public money was diverted away from London's inner city areas and emphasis was placed on private investment (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.30). In theory, this was to encourage the 'working of market forces' (Kettle and Hodges, 1982, p.30). But in reality, these so-called 'enterprise zones' were often poorly managed and became further dilapidated (Kettle and

Hodges, 1982, p.30). Once again, this policy was to impact disproportionately on the housing and employment prospects of black Londoners.

Conclusion

Whilst the feature films and fictional television programmes explored in this thesis do not reflect the socio-political circumstances outlined in this section in a straightforward manner, they do engage with it creatively in different ways and on a number of levels. The relationship between social and political change and cultural texts is always complex. However, there is clearly a correlation between the political and social intensity of the situation that I have described and its expression across a range of black cultural production. Arguably, both production and reception are shaped by the contextual issues that I have discussed in this section. What can be measured is the extent of the cultural activity within black communities, the outpouring of which is a product of the socio-political situation. Hence throughout this thesis, emphasis is placed on exploring the nature of creative agency.

Moreover, fictional texts, on which this thesis focuses almost exclusively, may also by their form and nature be able to reveal aspects of the socio-political situation that cannot be conveyed through non-fiction documentary sources. For example, as I demonstrate in part 2.5, the *Play for Today, A Hole in Babylon*, was a docudrama which sympathetically tackled the thorny subject of the 1975 Spaghetti House Siege, at a time when the BBC were cautious about making political comments about race relations in straightforward non-fiction documentary form. Numerous situation

comedies of the decade were explicitly predicated on issues of race and national identity, and the ambiguous, open-ended nature of the form enabled shows such as *Love Thy Neighbour* to sustain a variety of readings on the part of audiences (see part 2.3). In the next section I will provide a survey of the significant range of black feature films and fictional television programmes made and shown in Britain in the 1970s.

2.2 – Mapping the Field 2: A survey of black film and television

Introduction

The 1970s witnessed a range of interventions by black writers, directors and actors in British film and television. It is important to pay attention to these interventions, to explore their diversity and to appreciate the collaboration between a small group of black practitioners and institutional enablers and gatekeepers. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, institutional gatekeepers (such as producers and directors) helped to shape the way in which black expression was able to reach new audiences through film and television. This broad field reveals much about institutional access, and the degree of collaboration between black practitioners, and white and black practitioners. As will be shown, film and television texts allowed for the emergence of different (sometimes conflicting) discourses concerning black Britain in the 1970s.

Three British feature films made during the 1970s attempted to look at life from the perspective of black ‘West Indian’ communities. These were *Pressure*, *Black Joy* and *Babylon*. Although they vary in tone and content, *Pressure*, *Black Joy* and *Babylon* all rely heavily on location shooting and, to a greater or lesser extent, show what Kobena Mercer has described as a ‘documentary realist aesthetic’ (1988, p.9). All three films were independent productions made on low budgets. As with many of the television texts that I will discuss in this chapter, *Pressure*, *Black Joy* and *Babylon* are all set, and were made, in London. *Pressure* was filmed in and around Ladbroke Grove, *Black Joy* utilised some seventy locations in and around Brixton and *Babylon* was largely shot in Deptford. These films represent the most concerted ways in which black practitioners (directors, writers and actors) began to find

expression in the period. However, their production and reception histories reveal complicated and contested issues of black agency, authorship, authenticity and each show some degree of compromise.

As with feature film, television in the 1970s provided a limited number of fictional texts concerned with black British experience, yet those programmes that were made encompassed an amazing range of forms: single plays, a crime series, sitcoms and a soap opera. Issues of race were thus refracted through a wide variety of genres which addressed both middle-brow and popular tastes. Middle-brow texts generally took the form of single plays – although, as the examples of *Gloo Joo* (1979, LWT) and *Gangsters* (1975, BBC1) reveal, there were notable exceptions to this rule.

Popular texts included the crime series, the soap opera and the sitcom. To follow Leon Hunt, ‘low culture’ (such as that epitomised by *Love Thy Neighbour* or *Curry and Chips* (1969, LWT)) is inherently ‘unruly’ and as such can give way to liberal or reactionary readings on the part of the viewer (Hunt, 1998, p.15). The ambiguous nature of such ‘race’ comedies allowed audiences to read them either as satire or as reinforcing pre-existing racist views, depending on their political standpoint. While it would be easy to dismiss sitcoms such as *Love Thy Neighbour* as unsophisticated, the extent to which they directly addressed issues such as the boundaries of British identity and race relations policy is unprecedented in popular television. Indeed, many of the socio-political interventions that I outlined in part 2.1 find their way into sitcoms of the period. It is not unusual for characters in sitcoms to refer directly to the Race Relations Board, for example. It is also worth noting that programmes such as *Till Death Us Do Part* (1966-75, BBC 1) and *Love Thy Neighbour* regularly had audiences of up to 18 million, while average viewing figures for *Play for Today* were

less than half of this (see Shubik, 2000, p.75). Certainly both progressive and reactionary texts existed cheek by jowl and, as this chapter illustrates, there is no observable ‘grand narrative’ of the 1970s whereby fictional programmes became more enlightened as the decade progressed.

Another characteristic of black interventions in this period was a high degree of crossover (in terms of black practitioners) between film, black theatre and television. The director Horace Ové worked in both film and television, as did numerous actors such as Norman Beaton and Ram John Holder – both of whom had links with radical black theatre. Jamal Ali, who wrote both *Black Joy* and the BBC *Open Door* production *Black Feet in the Snow*, founded the radical black theatre group RAPP and, together with Norman Beaton, set up the Black Theatre of Brixton. Some actors also worked on a surprising range of projects – Rudolph Walker, for example, had starring parts in *Love Thy Neighbour* and *Empire Road* and stated that he was equally proud of both programmes (Pines, 1992, p.78). Black writers such as Michael Abbensetts, Jamal Ali, Horace Ové and Barry Reckord all wrote for television in the 1970s, although it is notable that this was generally for single plays - only Abbensetts wrote a soap opera (*Empire Road*) and none of the sitcoms had a black author.

Whilst in the 1970s no broadcasters actively promoted opportunities for black directors, actors and writers, informal networks grew whereby black and white practitioners worked together on more progressive film and television projects. BBC Pebble Mill was a particularly important creative hub for new single plays and *Empire Road*. London Weekend Television (LWT) on the other hand, was

responsible for many of the so-called ‘race sitcoms’. The work surveyed in this chapter demonstrates the inter-connectedness of actors and practitioners, and the eclecticism of their interventions across a range of forms. However, it must be emphasised that black voices were often compromised by commercial, institutional and political constraints, and this is a central theme of the analysis of creative agency which this thesis will explore.

Feature Films

Pressure (1975) was the first British feature film to be written and directed by a black filmmaker, Horace Ové. Originally from Trinidad, Ové was the only black director working in fictional television and feature film in Britain in the 1970s. In interview, Ové explained that he first became interested in film when growing up in Trinidad where numerous cinemas (built for the American Forces) meant that he was exposed to ‘the French movies, the Spanish movies’ (Horace Ové, personal communication, June 23, 2009). Ové originally came to Britain ‘around 1960’ to study painting, but it was his work as an extra on *Cleopatra* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1963, USA) that was to shape his future career as a film director (Ové, 2009). Ové recalled that the decision to move the production from the UK to Italy was to have a lasting influence on him as a filmmaker: ‘What was interesting in Italy was the filmmaking there. Fellini and Antonioni ... were making the surrealist films. And that’s how in my head I got even more into it. And when I came back here [London] I got into filmmaking here, I went down that road’ (Ové, 2009).

Following a period of study at the London Film School, Ové made two independent documentary films, *Baldwin’s Nigger* (1969) and *Reggae* (1970). He then went on to direct several documentaries for the BBC, including two episodes of BBC2’s

series *The World About Us* (1972 and 1978). Ové recalled that working as a black filmmaker in the 1970s required high levels of determination and tenacity on his part: '[as] the first black face on the scene ... I had to *push* doors open' (Ové, 2009). His recollection of his first meeting with the producer of *The World About Us* is particularly telling: 'I made an appointment [at the BBC] and wrote my name when I arrived. And when I came there, everybody was looking at me. And when I ... walked in, he [the producer] looked at me. He said, 'who are you? What do you want?' I said 'I'm Horace Ové the filmmaker'. He said, '*Really?*'' (Ové, 2009). The charismatic Ové was able to persuade the producer to hire him, but this example perhaps says much about the difficulties faced by black practitioners in the 1970s. Ové's film and television career in the 1970s also reveals much about the crossover between the two media and between creative personnel. Indeed, many of the film crew that Ové assembled at film school continued to work for him on various film and television projects, often free of charge (Ové, 2009). Ové's later directorial work for the BBC, including episodes of the soap opera, *Empire Road* are discussed at the end of this section, and his *Play for Today*, *A Hole in Babylon* is explored in detail in part 2.5.

Ové's 1975 feature film, *Pressure*, grew out of a *Play for Today* script which he co-wrote with the Trinidadian writer, Samuel Selvon (author of *The Lonely Londoners*) (Ové, 2009). Although the play was commissioned by Robert Buckler (a script editor for the BBC), it was never made (*Pressure* production notes, n.a.). Ové and Selvon then decided that *Pressure* could work as a film (Ové, 2009). Much of *Pressure* was based on Ové and Selvon's own experiences of living in the Ladbroke Grove area of London (Ové, 2009). As part of their research, the two men recorded

‘dozens of interviews’ with young black people living in Ladbroke Grove, including a group of youths who were squatting in a ‘derelict house’ (*Pressure* production notes, n.a.). Ové and Selvon then wove their testimony into *Pressure*’s narrative. Ové would go on to use this painstaking method of research in preparing *A Hole in Babylon*. Keen that the film should be as authentic as possible, Ové used a mixture of experienced actors (such as Norman Beaton and Lucita Lijertwood) and non-professional actors from London-based black theatre groups (*Pressure* production notes, n.a.). Herbert Norville – who played the main character, Tony – was recruited by Ové from a black drama group in Islington (*Pressure* production notes, n.a.). Radical black theatres and workshops provided a regular source of actors recruited for film and television work in the 1970s. *Pressure*’s unprecedented degree of black authorship was recognised by *Race Today*, which heralded the film as being ‘the first full length feature film in Britain [to be] inspired, scripted, directed and acted in the main by black people’ (Rugg, 1975, p.283).

Pressure tells the story of Tony, a sixteen-year-old black school-leaver. Unlike his parents and his politically radical older brother, Colin (Oscar James), Tony was born in Britain and, his character occupies a metaphorical hinterland between Britishness and ‘back home’. In an early scene, Bopsey (Lijertwood), Tony’s Trinidadian mother, serves up bacon and eggs for her younger son’s breakfast: meanwhile, Colin eats avocado with chilli sauce and sarcastically refers to Tony as a ‘white boy’. Despite being well-mannered and in possession of good qualifications, Tony finds that his colour puts him at a disadvantage when seeking work. This is epitomised in a scene where he is asked to leave an interview as soon as the employer sees that he is black. Horace Ové revealed that this was based on the aforementioned experience

that he had had with the producer of *The World About Us* (Ové, 2009). Tony's parents are unable to understand that the situation that he finds himself in is not of his own making. Consequently, as the film progresses, Tony becomes estranged from them. He eventually leaves home and lives in a squat with a group of young black men who have experienced similar problems. Increasingly radicalised, he joins his brother's Black Power group and is spellbound by the powerful speech given by the American Sister Louise (Sheila Scott-Wilkinson). It is at this meeting that Tony experiences police brutality at first hand: 'Where is your warrant?' screams Sister Louise as a policeman slams her against a wall. 'The law is not concerned with you and your lot', retorts the policeman. Colin is arrested and his parents' home is raided by the police. The distraught Bopsie is unable to understand why her house has been ransacked and blames Colin for 'making trouble'. In interview, Ové revealed that he was keen that *Pressure* should meld the personal and the political: 'The film was telling [a story] about the whole race struggle. But, you know, the film did not just deal with that. It was about the problems of the family and everything' (Ové, 2009).

Whilst most of *Pressure* has a documentary realist aesthetic, the narrative contains a dream sequence where Tony is at a stately home, confronting Britain's colonial past. As Tony walks into an ornately decorated bedroom, he advances towards a bed and stabs the inhabitant, which is a pig. As Ové stated, the subconscious world reveals much about the conscious one and, as a director, he was eager to employ the surrealism that he had encountered in French and Italian films (Ové, 2009). The transcendent dream sequence signals Tony's complete radicalisation and rejection of the world of his 'accepting' immigrant parents. Importantly, as Paul Newland

argues, the sequence can also be read ‘in terms of its formal hybridity...[it] echoes developments seen in the work of a number of postcolonial writers and theorists who were attempting to develop new ways of articulating aspects of black experience...’ (2013, p.117). Ové switches back to documentary realism for the final part of the film – where Tony and his Black Power comrades take to the streets to demonstrate about Colin’s unfair incarceration. As they walk in heavy rain, the placards that they have made begin to slowly disintegrate. The camera draws back to reveal a bedraggled and ultimately powerless group of people.

Pressure received funding from the British Film Institute (BFI) Production Board and the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC). The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) awarded it an ‘AA’ certificate. However, the archive reveals that the examiners Ken Penry and Rosemary Stark were at loggerheads when it came to the film’s classification. Penry argued that ‘strong dialogue (17 “fucks”’, the portrayal of ‘considerable police brutality’ and the dream sequence ‘all placed it in the ‘X’ category’ (Penry and Stark, 1976). Stark was more sympathetic and argued that it should be seen by young people similar to those portrayed: ‘To me the film seems to discuss with ...sympathy and ... balance, the simple black politics of despair ... it raises the sort of questions black teenagers must be discussing’ (Penry and Stark, 1976). The eventual granting of an ‘AA’ is especially interesting when compared with *Babylon*’s ‘X’, since scenes in *Pressure* are arguably more graphic than anything which appears in *Babylon* (see part 2.4).

Pressure premiered at the 1975 London Film Festival (Rugg, 1975, p.283) but it did not gain a general release until 1978. Despite the fact that finding distribution was

(and remains) a familiar challenge for independent British films, Ové has subsequently claimed that *Pressure* was deliberately ‘banned by people who thought that the film should not be shown [due to the scene in which] the police raided the black power meeting’ (Ové, 2009).

Pressure was praised (and perhaps thwarted) due to its perceived ‘black authenticity’ (Rugg, 1975, p.283). However, *Race Today* regarded *Black Joy* as a problematic text, both in terms of authorship and representation (Rugg, 1978, p.13: see also Dolan and Spicer, 2010, pp.86-90). Directed by Anthony Simmons and written by the radical black playwright, Jamal Ali, *Black Joy* was mainly filmed in Brixton. It tells the story of a Guyanese ‘innocent country boy’, who arrives in Brixton with a cardboard suitcase and a few pounds in his pocket. Benjamin (Trevor Thomas) meets the ‘arch-hustler’, Dave King (Norman Beaton) who primarily lives off his long-suffering girlfriend Miriam (Floella Benjamin). Dave is bent on corrupting Benjamin and takes him on a spree around Brixton’s betting shops, shebeens, pubs and brothels. Benjamin is seduced by a white woman, but eventually wins the affections of the flighty Saffra (Dawn Hope). Finally, all innocence gone, Benjamin manages to ‘out hustle’ Dave in a deal over a second hand car. The film’s documentary realism sits uneasily with its blaxploitation themes and it was condemned for its voyeuristic depiction of ‘life in the ghetto’ (Rugg, 1978, p.13). *Black Joy*’s fascinating production history reveals a struggle over authorship which says much about issues of black agency. This is discussed in detail in part 3.3, while part 3.4 explores the reception of the film in Brixton.

Whereas *Black Joy*’s portrayal of black life was strongly criticised (notably by *Race Today*) *Babylon*, like *Pressure*, was praised for its documentary realism (Charles,

1981, p.90). Although *Babylon* had a large cast of black actors and extras, its director (Franco Rosso) and writer (Martin Stellman) were both white. However, as I shall go on to demonstrate in part 2.4, ‘authenticity’, in terms of authorship, is not predicated simply on the colour of the skin of the director or writer. *Babylon* tells the story of Blue (Brinsley Forde) and his group of friends, Beefy (Trevor Laird), Spark (Brian Bovell) and Lover (Victor Romero Evans). The group have a reggae sound system and much of the action is based around their rivalry with another crew. However, like *Pressure*, *Babylon* melds the personal and the political. Blue is pursued and beaten by the police despite having committed no offence, and the lock-up where the sound system equipment is kept is broken into and daubed with racist graffiti. The initially peaceable Blue becomes more and more attracted by Rastafarianism, but relentless pressure eventually leads him to stab a racist neighbour. The film ends with Blue ‘toasting’ at a club while the police break the doors down. As will be shown below, the archive reveals much about *Babylon*’s production history, marketing and reception. All three feature films provide evidence of the struggles to articulate black British experience during the 1970s and their dominant, sometimes contested, modes of expression.

Television Plays

If the three feature films produced in the 1970s afforded black practitioners their most concerted opportunities for self-expression, the single play provided an important platform for black voices on television. With the notable exceptions of *Gloo Joo* and *Gangsters* all of the television plays discussed in this section have black authors.

The 1972 *Play for Today*, *In the Beautiful Caribbean* was written by the Jamaican playwright, Barry Reckord and directed by Philip Saville. Barry Reckord settled in London in the late 1950s, having previously won Jamaica's Issa Scholarship to study English at Cambridge (Busby, 2012, n.p.). Between 1957 and 1963, Reckord had five plays produced at London's Royal Court Theatre; one of these, *You in Your Small Corner*, was adapted for Granada Television's *Play of the Week* strand in 1962 (Chambers, 2011, p.121; Liarou, n.d.). However, it was Reckord's 1963 stage play *Skyvers* which brought his work to the attention of the *Play for Today* producer, Irene Shubik (Shubik, 2000, pp.134-135). Shubik was highly impressed with *Skyvers* – a play about a group of disaffected youths in a secondary modern school – and later commissioned Reckord to write for *Play for Today* (Shubik, 2000, p.135). It is worth noting the power and autonomy that producers (especially at the BBC) had during the 1970s. Irene Shubik, Peter Ansorge and Graham Benson each commissioned work from black writers and directors and, as such, acted as both gatekeepers and facilitators. Indeed, as Horace Ové made clear in interview, if 'you wanted to get into television' it was absolutely vital that you got the backing of a 'helpful producer' (Ové, 2009). Reckord had already begun work on a stage play, *In the Beautiful Caribbean*, when he was approached by Shubik and it was this work that he completed and adapted for television (Shubik, 2000, p.135). With a strong all-black cast that included Carmen Munroe, Thomas Baptiste and Ram John Holder, *In the Beautiful Caribbean* portrayed the travails of a group of people living in Jamaica (Shubik, 2000, p.135). As Shubik commented: 'It seemed to me that there had been a certain number of plays about poor Jamaicans in England, but none that I

knew of depicting the background from which they came and showing the poverty which motivated their ... migration [to England]' (Shubik, 2000, p.135).

In the Beautiful Caribbean set out to critique colonialism and to put forward the case for black 'political consciousness' (Shubik, 2000, p.135). It was Reckord's intention that the play would contain original songs. To this end, Shubik contacted Horace Ové, having admired his 1970 documentary, *Reggae*. Ové then 'took charge of the music and commission[ed] a number of West Indian composers to write the songs' (Shubik, 2000, p.135). Again, this example shows the high degree of collaboration among black practitioners working in film, television, music and theatre in the 1970s. *In the Beautiful Caribbean* seemingly had a mixed reception when it was aired. Some viewers complained that they could not understand the authentic Jamaican patois that was used throughout the play; even Shubik later admitted that 'what amounted to a folk opera was perhaps too ambitious a project for television' (Shubik, 2000, p.136). Nevertheless, *In the Beautiful Caribbean* is important not only in terms of black authorship and collaboration, but also because it represents a rare attempt to explain the political roots of black diasporic (re)settlement in a non-documentary realist mode.

The Guyanese playwright Michael Abbensetts wrote several plays for television in the 1970s. These included *The Museum Attendant* (1973, BBC 2), *Black Christmas* and *Road Runner* (1977, Thames Television). Abbensetts also wrote two series of the soap opera *Empire Road* and some episodes of *Crown Court* (1972-84, Granada). Abbensetts' first stage play, *Sweet Talk* (1973) was performed at the Royal Court Theatre and he credited this early success with his entrée into writing for television

(Pines, 1992, p.132). Certainly it was *Sweet Talk* that first made Peter Ansorge (script editor on *Black Christmas* and *Empire Road*'s producer) keen to work with Abbensetts (Peter Ansorge, personal communication, June 7, 2011). Moreover, *Sweet Talk*, a humorous but brutally honest play about a young Caribbean couples' unhappy existence in a tiny London flat, was directed for the stage by Stephen Frears (Chambers, 2011p.140). Frears would later go on to direct Abbensetts' *Black Christmas* for BBC Birmingham. It is worth noting that Abbensetts did not simply 'move to television'; rather his writing for television ran parallel with his stage work and, for much of this period, he was resident dramatist at the Royal Court (Chambers, 2011, p.140).

A middle-class graduate, Michael Abbensetts came to Britain in 1963 (Pines, 1992, p.132). Despite his academic credentials, Abbensetts spent his first decade in London doing a series of menial day jobs and it was this disjuncture that was to inform much of his writing (Abbensetts in Pines, 1992, p.133). Abbensetts' personal experience of working as a security guard at the Tower of London formed the basis of his first television play, *The Museum Attendant*. Shown as part of BBC2's *Centre Play* strand, *The Museum Attendant* is concerned with Howard (Horace James), a middle-aged, middle-class West Indian whose wife has abandoned him. Much of the action of the play takes place in the staff kitchen where Howard and the cheerful young African, John (Kwesi Kay) are subjected to racist comments from their white co-workers. Flynn (Tony Selby) is particularly vocal in his racism. When, at one point, a colleague censures him for his behaviour towards Howard, Flynn points at him and snarls: 'He must have shares in the Race Relations Board'.

Director Derek Bennett filmed *The Museum Attendant* entirely on location in ‘a real London museum’ (Abbensetts in Pines, 1992, p.133). ‘Hating immigrants is the only thing that draws English people together’, John jokes to Howard, as the camera lingers on museum exhibits that are redolent of Britain’s colonial past. Nevertheless, John’s sunny disposition is gradually ground down in the face of relentless racism:

John: I’m not welcome, nobody here has made me welcome

Flynn: You’ve got a chip on your shoulder

John: Back home...

Flynn: Yeah go back home!

The fact that Howard is middle-class and over-qualified for his post means that he is regarded with suspicion by his white working-class colleagues. However, he is aware that the colour of his skin will block any chance of promotion and consequently doesn’t even bother to apply for the Deputy Head Attendant post. When a white colleague subsequently taunts him that his wife left because of his ‘lack of ambition’, Howard comments sadly: ‘she’s gone home, she’s gone to her mother, she caught a plane and went back home ... the trouble with middle-class West Indians is that they are always afraid of being found out. They hide themselves away in a place like this’. Tellingly, when Howard has a huge show-down with Flynn, it is class as much as race that is at the heart of their confrontation. As Flynn admits at the end of the row: ‘I’ve never been able to enjoy my own country, there’s been recession, depression for the working man’. Flynn’s racism evidently has its roots in his own insecurities about the fragile boundaries of British national and class identity.

Abbensetts’ *Road Runner* (1977) was written for *ITV Playhouse* (Brooke, n.d.).

Like *The Museum Attendant*, *Road Runner* is concerned with the thwarted ambitions

of middle-class, middle-aged West Indian migrants. Barry Reckord plays Alvin Archer who, despite being highly-educated, works as a railway porter. His wife Portia (Nadia Cattouse) also has a low-paid menial job. When their son Jason (Trevor Thomas) arrives home unexpectedly after a few years of living and working abroad, he is highly critical of his parents' 'acceptance' of their life in Britain (Brooke, n.d.). The confident and brash Jason is initially evasive about his own choice of career, although it is clear that he has made a great deal of money. It is only after a series of increasingly bitter confrontations that Jason reveals to his shocked parents that he is an arms dealer. It also becomes apparent that some of Jason's time abroad has actually been spent in prison. Alvin Archer is horrified by his son's activities, but Jason is unrepentant about selling guns to Africa – indeed, he regards himself as a freedom fighter. Whilst there is much to suggest that Jason's 'politics' are little more than a front for his personal avarice, Abbensetts cleverly contrasts Jason's material success with that of two of his contemporaries who have stayed in Britain. Trevor (Ram John Holder), is an impoverished musician, while Jason's ex-girlfriend (Janet Bartley) is an unhappy housewife with a small child. Although Portia's sudden death brings about a degree of reconciliation between father and son, Jason's negotiations with the shady Albert (Rudolph Walker) make it clear to the viewer that he is ready to embark on a further nefarious foreign project (Brooke, n.d.).

Black Christmas (1977) came about after a chance encounter between Michael Abbensetts and Peter Ansorge (then script editor at BBC Pebble Mill). In interview, Ansorge explained that:

After about a year at Pebble Mill, I bumped into Michael on [London's] Oxford Street ... I told him ... what I was doing. And he said, 'Can I send you an idea?'. I said, 'Yes, as long

as it's contemporary and it's set outside London ... [Later] he phoned me up and said 'I want to write about a black family in Birmingham at Christmas' ... that was the origin of the idea (Peter Ansorge, personal communication, June 7 2011).

Ansorge recalled that he pitched Abbensetts' idea to Tara Prem, who was a producer for Pebble Mill's *Second City Firsts* strand (Ansorge, 2011). Impressed with the concept, Prem commissioned Abbensetts to write the script, which he delivered within three weeks (Ansorge, 2011). Based on Abbensetts' 'actual experiences' and 'people that [he] knew about', *Black Christmas* was directed by Stephen Frears who 'made it as a film shot on location for television' (Abbensetts in Pines, 1992, p.133). All of the action takes place in a family home; the house used in the play was a 'West Indian woman's house' in Birmingham, which added to the production's 'authentic feel' (Abbensetts in Pines, 1992, pp.133-134). *Black Christmas* is the story of Gertrude's (Carmen Munroe) attempt to host a 'West Indian Christmas' for some of her family and a white neighbour, Lily (Linda Goddard). The play begins with Gertrude and Lily preparing food in the kitchen while Gertrude's lazy husband Bertie (Norman Beaton) makes cheery observations from his chair. Later, Gertrude's brother, Herman (Stefan Kalipha) and his wife, Dolly (Janet Bartley) arrive, quickly followed by Gertrude's daughter, Renee (Shope Shodeinde). As the day unfolds, tensions begin to surface within the household. Renee is pregnant but scared to tell her mother, and the predatory serial philanderer, Herman, turns his (unwanted) attentions to Lily. Dolly, unable to cope with her husband's flirting any longer, physically attacks him and then, crying uncontrollably, seeks solace in the kitchen with Gertrude. The scene between the traumatised Dolly and the stoical Gertrude is deeply revealing. For Dolly, Christmas in England can never compare to Christmas 'back home' – indeed she carries her homesickness within her like an emotional ulcer. In between sobs, Dolly lists all of the food that made up the

Christmas feast in Guyana (and by inference lacking from this particular celebration). Gertrude listens tight-lipped to Dolly and then says quietly, ‘I got feelings too, I make do, I make the best of things ... twenty years I in this country, twenty years away from the West Indies. England is my home, I grin and bear it’. Although *Black Christmas* ends on a seemingly optimistic note - Gertrude persuades the group to sing a Christmas carol together - there is a forced air to the festivities and an ultimate sense of isolation.

Whereas Abbensetts’ television plays used a realist aesthetic to document the travails of middle-class black family life, the 1974 BBC 2 *Open Door* production *Black Feet in The Snow* was a significant departure from the form insofar that it combined non-naturalistic Brechtian dramaturgy with Caribbean orature. Written by Jamal Ali and featuring a cast from his black theatre group RAPP, *Black Feet in the Snow* tells the story of Jahn-Jahn, a young migrant from Guyana, whose experiences in a hostile Brixton bring about his political radicalisation. *Black Feet in the Snow* is discussed in detail in part 3.2.

The controversial *Play for Today, Gangsters* (1975, BBC 1) dealt with multicultural Birmingham’s criminal underbelly. Produced at Pebble Mill by Barry Hanson and David Rose, and written by Philip Martin, *Gangsters* ‘was a deliberate departure from the conventions of serious social drama for which *Play for Today* was renowned’ (Cooke, 2003, p.119). *Gangsters* was a brash hybrid of thriller, ‘cop-show’ and ‘classic western’ (Cooke, 2003, p.120; Collinson, n.d.). As Barry Hanson asserted, *Gangsters* ‘took its cue ... from contemporary American crime movies ... it aimed to entertain’ (Hanson cited in Cooke, 2003, p.120). To this end,

the play (shot on 16mm) included hard-boiled portrayals of ‘every ethnic minority in the city [Birmingham] – Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Sikh and the ... Bangladeshi population’ (Hanson cited in Cooke, 2003, p.120). Director Philip Saville shot much of *Gangsters* on location in and around Birmingham and the play’s opening credits show a multi-cultural street scene. A club comedian provides a voice-over, in which he jokes about ‘this great big African fella’, ‘Paki’s’ and ‘Irish immigrants’. *Gangsters*’ key protagonist is John Klein (Maurice Colbourne), a white undercover agent who is pursued by Khan (Ahmed Khalil), a special branch security agent. Together Klein and Khan take the viewer on a voyeuristic and violent inner-city tour of seedy strip clubs, drug-dens and knocking-shops. As Khan says to Klein early in the story: ‘Corruption is a cancer that has spread through the Midlands’. Gavin Collinson has commented that the play ‘features racial stereotypes ... portraying Indian men as servile, black men as thugs and white men as culturally unaware’ (Collinson, n.d.). Black people are particularly negatively represented in *Gangsters* – the men are portrayed as violent drug dealers or pimps and one scene deals with a black woman who is forced to go through a humiliating audition to be a stripper in a club.

Gangsters came in for a fair amount of criticism, not least from Birmingham City Council who were deeply unhappy with the way in which the city and its inhabitants were portrayed (Newton, 2011, p.157; Collinson, n.d.). Nevertheless, *Gangsters* achieved high ratings and was subsequently developed into two six-part serials (1976 and 1978 BBC1) (Newton, 2011, p.157). In its serial incarnation *Gangsters* became increasingly non-naturalistic in form. In a couple of episodes the audience is unexpectedly shown ‘the studio cameras and the production team’ – a move that

emphasised the show's artifice, perhaps in order to quell unease about its racial stereotypes (Cooke, 2003, p.120). Certainly Peter Ansorge was proud of *Gangsters* and felt that it provided an interesting reflection on 'multi-racial Britain' (taken from Newton, 2011, p.157).

The 1979 *Play for Today*, *A Hole in Babylon* was directed and co-written by Horace Ové. Like *Gangsters*, it dealt with crime, but told the true story of the so-called Spaghetti House siege of 1975. *A Hole in Babylon* used a series of flashbacks and actual news footage to re-imagine the events that led up to the bungled burglary of a Knightsbridge restaurant. In so doing, it presented a sympathetic account of the key protagonists, Bonsu Monroe (Trevor Thomas) and Wesley Dick (Archie Pool). *A Hole in Babylon* was deeply controversial, not least because it presented the compelling argument that the crime was committed on ideological grounds. The production history of *A Hole in Babylon* reveals much about black agency and collaboration and is discussed in detail in part 2.5.

Gloo Joo (1979, LWT) was a television adaptation of Michael Hastings' 1978 stage play. It was commissioned for LWT by Humphrey Barclay and directed by John Kay Cooper. Set in Brixton, *Gloo Joo* is a comedy about the exploits of Meadowlark Warner (Oscar James), a Jamaican 'con man and illegal immigrant' who is threatened with deportation (Elam, 1995, p.173; Rugg, 1980, p.87). Meadowlark Warner uses a strong Jamaican vernacular throughout the play, and this 'mimicking of black speech by [a] non-black writer' proved to be highly controversial among certain audiences (Elam, 1995, p.173). Akua Rugg, writing for *Race Today*, was horrified:

Warner's personality and behaviour characterises West Indians as ... idiots ..., relying on low cunning rather than on a developed intelligence to see them through. By the end ... because Hastings has attributed not one admirable characteristic to Warner, he appears not so much a person, more a performing animal, jumping at his white creator's commands (Rugg, 1980, p.87).

Meadowlark Warner evades deportation, but this is only achieved through a series of hustles ('trying to cheat de honest public'), the exploitation of women in his community ('I a dirty bastard what livin off of women'), and a general lack of self-respect ('I a hypocrite, I a lying cheat') (Elam, 1995, p.173). For Rugg, one of the many troubling elements of *Gloo Joo* was that the black characters showed no sense of solidarity towards each other. For her, the underlying message of the comedy was 'the black man's inhumanity to the black man' (Rugg, 1980, p.87). *Gloo Joo*, she concluded, amounted to little more than a voyeuristic 'coon show' (Rugg, 1980, p.87). It is notable that Norman Beaton turned down the opportunity to play Meadowlark Warner. In a 1979 interview for *Radio Times*, he explained that *Gloo Joo*: 'lack[ed] veracity in every area of importance. If a white man ... is going to write parts for black people, then he has to be absolutely true' (Beaton taken from Khan, 1979, n.p.). Nevertheless, T Bone Wilson, who had a background in radical black theatre (and starred in *A Hole in Babylon*) played the part of the hustler Livingstone.

In the 1970s television drama producers gave black writers opportunities to tell their own stories and reach new audiences, albeit in strands conventionally appealing to middle-brow tastes. This output reflects the strong relationship some writers had with the theatre and, with some rare exceptions, the dominance of realist discourses.

Sitcoms

Although some black writers found a degree of self-expression in the single play, by far the most conspicuous way that race was addressed on television was in the situation comedy. From the mid-1960s to the end of the 1970s, a wide range of what Sarita Malik has termed as ‘race sitcoms’ were aired on British television (2002, p.91). As John Fiske has argued, popular television texts such as sitcom are reliant upon ‘contradictions and openness’ (1986, p.391). In this way, ‘diverse audiences’ can make polysemic readings which afford ‘space for resistance and negotiation’ (1986, p.391). It is possible to suggest that the open-ended nature of ‘race sitcoms’ allowed audiences to negotiate issues of race and identity during a particularly contested time in British race relations. In this way, it is interesting to note that a 1976 IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) report, *Race Relations and Independent Television*, stated that issues of ‘race prejudice and conflict’ could be explored and perhaps ‘minimised ... almost solely through jokes’ (Glencross, 1976, p.4). These factors perhaps go some way to explaining the prevalence and popularity of ‘race sitcoms’ throughout this period.

A further important point to make about the sitcoms is that the race theme was frequently refracted through the format’s popular assumptions about class. The sitcoms discussed (with the notable exception of *Mixed Blessings* (1987-80, LWT)) are predominantly concerned with working-class life and social mores. Moreover, the sitcoms are generally located in London; significantly *Mixed Blessings*’ white family are based in Sussex, while the black family are based in London’s Richmond. Pragmatically the London settings may be a reflection of the fact that the majority

were produced by LWT or Thames Television. Narratively, however, the conflicted race politics of inner city London (outlined in part 2.1) doubtless contributed to a popular fictionalised presumption that race relations were a mainly metropolitan matter.

Although, as has been shown above, the BBC generally addressed issues of race through more ‘middle-brow’ fictional forms such as the single play, the first ‘race sitcom’, *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965-68: 1972-75, BBC1), was also made by the BBC. Arguably, *Till Death Us Do Part*, with its working-class London setting and highly combative approach to race relations, helped to both pave the way for and set the tone of subsequent ‘race sitcoms’ of the 1970s. According to Sarita Malik, the majority of these sitcoms presented black people as being in some way problematic to broader society:

[they] were actually comedies about blacks signifying *trouble*; *trouble* with the neighbours, *trouble* with fitting in, *trouble* with language, so that if the white characters did display prejudice, this was deemed funny or understandable given ‘the difficulty of the situation’ [emphasis in original] (Malik, 2002, p.97).

Till Death Us Do Part was written by Johnny Speight. Highly popular, it regularly drew weekly audiences of up to 18 million (Malik, 2002, p.91). Malik has stated that *Till Death Us Do Part*, ‘with its direct reference to racial difference ... signalled a drastic break from television’s habitually ‘polite’ and awkward response towards racial themes’ (2002, p.92). Intended as a satire on prejudice, the programme had the monstrously bigoted Alf Garnett (Warren Mitchell) as its key protagonist. Garnett’s racist rants (which included language such as ‘wog’ and ‘coon’) were frequently challenged by his liberal daughter, Rita (Una Stubbs) and her partner Mike (Anthony Booth) (Malik, 2002, p.93). When the show was first aired, Speight

and Mitchell claimed that Alf Garnett provided such an outrageous ‘parody of [racist] attitudes’ that the audience could do nothing other than ‘to find his views ridiculous’ (Mills, 2005, p.106). However, as Gavin Schaffer has argued, the ambivalent nature of the comedy allowed ‘the audience to read the show as racist or anti-racist’ (2010, p.110). Indeed, Speight received both censure *and* praise ‘for his treatment of black people’ from ‘black and white viewers’ (Malik, 2002, p.93). Evidently, while some viewers ‘read’ *Till Death Us Do Part* as satire, others took Garnett at face value and ‘laughed with him as he mocked other races and lifestyles’ (Mills, 2005, p.107). It is perhaps unsurprising that Alf Garnett’s hectoring voice resonated with certain audiences when one considers the degree of public sympathy for Enoch Powell, and the tough governmental stance on immigration. Moreover, Angela Barry has argued that: ‘the public airing of Garnett’s prejudices gave them real legitimacy’ and may have helped certain sections of the audience to further vocalise such views in public (1988, p.89). In public, both Speight and Mitchell continued to defend *Till Death Do Us Part* throughout its long run on television (Mills, 2005, p.106). However, it is telling that Speight later admitted that the character of Alf Garnett had captured certain attitudes to race and that he had become a ‘hero’ in the eyes of many viewers (Malik, 2002, p.93).

Speight also wrote *Curry and Chips* (1969, LWT). Set on the factory floor of the fictional firm, Lilicrap Ltd, *Curry and Chips* explored the relationships between Kevin O’Grady (Spike Milligan) and his co-workers. Like *Till Death Do Us Part*, the sitcom was highly controversial, not least because Milligan’s character was blacked-up and played the part of an Irish Pakistani (Jaafer, n.d.). Throughout the series, O’Grady is referred to as ‘Paki Paddy’ and racist insults are traded by

members of the cast. *Curry and Chips* did include a character of Asian descent (Kenny, played by Kenny Lynch) but as Malik has argued, his presence primarily allowed for an ‘exploitation of the difference between Asians and Afro-Caribbeans’ (2002, p.95). In this way, the character of Kenny allowed the audience to identify with racist comments made about West Indians. As with *Till Death Us Do Part*, *Curry and Chips* contains a ‘liberal’ white character (Arthur, played by Eric Sykes) who challenges some of the egregious racist assumptions and statements made by the workers. However, Ali Jaaffer points out that, ‘not even Arthur is above using words like wog and coon’ (Jaaffer, n.d). What is interesting about *Curry and Chips* is the way in which it engages (albeit crudely) with notions of British identity. Thus Kenny is treated slightly better than Kevin on the grounds that he was born in Britain. The sitcom is also shot through with anxieties about ‘coloured immigrants’ in the workplace. *Curry and Chips* was much less successful than *Till Death Us Do Part* and was cancelled after six episodes (Jaaffer, n.d).

Love Thy Neighbour was arguably the most popular and successful of the 1970s ‘race sitcoms’. Throughout its long run it regularly attracted ‘around 18 million viewers’ (IBA Special Report, 1975, p.2). However it was also deeply controversial, not least for its frequent use of racist language. *Love thy Neighbour* was based around one very simple ‘joke’ – namely the shock of finding out that one’s neighbours were black. *Love thy Neighbour* is set in (the fictional) Maple Terrace in Twickenham. Whilst the sitcom is set in suburbia, the opening credits make it clear that this is a working-class London suburb. The viewer is presented with a row of poky terrace houses which are overshadowed by a large gasometer. The down-at-heel nature of the neighbourhood is reinforced in episode one when the white couple,

the bullish Eddie Booth and his placid wife Joan (Jack Smethurst and Kate Williams) learn that the house next door to them has been sold:

Joan: It [the house next door] went very quickly didn't it?

Eddie: It's a very desirable neighbourhood

Joan: You must be joking. Half of these houses would need to be done up before they were fit to be pulled down.

When Eddie spots his new neighbour, Bill Reynolds (Rudolph Walker) moving in to the house, he assumes that Bill is the removal man. An argument ensues between the two men which sets the tone for their combative relationship throughout the run of the entire sitcom. The socialist Eddie is horrified to find out that not only is his new neighbour black, he is also a Tory, and will be working alongside him (in a factory). Meanwhile, Joan Booth quietly makes friends with Bill's wife Barbie (Nina Baden-Sempler).

The interior of Eddie and Joan's home places it firmly in Haralovich's category of the unruly 'cramped and unpleasant' working-class dwelling (2003, p.73). The *mise-en-scène* lends it the tired look of post-war austerity. The kitchen is furnished with grubby kitchen appliances which date back two decades. The sitting room's scuffed brown wallpaper, shabby sofa and mismatched items of misplaced bric-a-brac all contrive to contribute to an air of domestic neglect. By contrast, the Reynolds' fashionable home boasts freshly white-painted walls, soft furnishings in bright geometric prints and artfully positioned lamps. An immaculate white carpet graces the floor of the lounge. The sophistication of the Reynolds' taste is commented on by Joan when she and Eddie are left alone in their neighbours' house:

Joan: Here they've got some nice stuff here Eddie

Eddie: Yeah not bad. A bit flashy though.

Joan: They've got a lovely radiogramme.

Eddie: Well that's only to be expected love. They do a lot of dancing.

This example is typical of the double-bind that is evident throughout *Love Thy Neighbour*. Whereas the *mise-en-scène* disrupts stereotypical notions about how a black couple may choose to live, Eddie's jibe about dancing and its clear allusion to the jungle neatly repositions Bill and Barbie as 'savages'.

Action in *Love Thy Neighbour* also takes place outside of the domestic sphere. Studio sets include the factory where Bill and Eddie work, the staff canteen and the Jubilee Social Club. All of these environments enable Eddie to make racist comments about Bill (at work, Eddie often refers to Bill as Al Jolson, for example). However, as Brett Mills has commented, social space in sitcoms is often gendered (2005, p.112). In this way, Joan and Barbie spend most of their day in the home. The two women meet up regularly in each other's kitchens and become firm friends (a source of consternation to their husbands). On the rare occasions that Joan and Barbie go 'out' they are accompanied by their husbands and attempt to stop the constant arguing of their partners.

As with *Curry and Chips*, *Love thy Neighbour* is overly concerned with contested notions of British identity and 'belonging' in an increasingly multi-cultural society. Indeed, it is interesting to note that throughout the sitcom Eddie's workmate Arthur regularly remonstrates with Eddie to 'accept Bill as one of us'. A detailed account of contemporaneous audience and institutional responses to *Love Thy Neighbour* will be provided in part 2.3.

The Fosters (1976-77) was billed as the first ‘all-black sitcom’ to appear on British television (Beaton, 1986, p.190). Nevertheless, it is important to note that *The Fosters* was directed by *Love Thy Neighbour*’s white producer, Stuart Allen, and also had a white script writer, John Watkins. So only *The Fosters*’ actors were black (although this in itself represented a significant departure from previous ‘race sitcoms’). Moreover, *The Fosters*’ cast, which included highly-talented actors such as Norman Beaton (Samuel Foster), Carmen Munroe (Wilma) and Isabelle Lucas (Pearl Foster) were able to quickly jell as an ensemble. Lenny Henry (Sonny Foster) later described the way in which, as a young actor, he received informal mentoring from the more experienced members of the cast:

Learning how to act from people like Carmen, Norman and Isabelle was such a great discipline ... they would tell you off if you were standing in the wrong place or couldn’t remember your lines ... So learning how to behave on a television set ... was my main experience in *The Fosters* (Henry taken from Pines, 1992, p.212).

This example provides useful evidence of the way in which professional camaraderie between black actors could sometimes enable them to transcend a limited script. The collaboration of a small number of black actors provided an education to the next generation and facilitated performances that were imbued with integrity.

Twenty-six episodes of *The Fosters* were made and shown over two seasons (Beaton, 1986, p.190). *The Fosters* was adapted from an American sitcom, *Good Times* and, as such, retained many of the storylines from the programme on which it was based (Newton, 2011, p.166). This meant the inclusion of certain characters and stories which must have appeared incongruous to British viewers – for example, the appearance of a television evangelist in one episode.

Seemingly mindful of the difficult socio-political climate in which it was aired, Cyril Bennett, London Weekend controller of programmes, made the somewhat startling claim that *The Fosters* would contain ‘no racial overtones’ (taken from Newton, 2011, p.167). Perhaps as a consequence, *The Fosters* is a curious mix of politically anodyne material which is occasionally interspersed with fairly radical dialogue and imagery. Arguably, this disjunction is played out in the opening credits. The beginning of the montage depicts a highly utopian image of multicultural London. A small black girl skips in a school playground with white and Asian friends, black and white neighbours shop together in the local market, ‘West Indians’ play cricket at the Oval, and a black policeman dances in the street. However, as the signature tune fades out, these optimistic images are replaced by that of a Brutalist tower block which is home to the Foster family. As none of the family appears in the initial montage, this perhaps serves to underline their social isolation.

This sense of social exclusion is also reflected in the show’s *mise-en-scène*. Most of the action in *The Fosters* takes place in a small living room. Although the set includes a tiny kitchen, this space is seldom occupied and the viewer is not shown any other rooms. Occasionally, a family member ventures out of the front door into a dimly-lit, graffiti-covered corridor, but this is posited as a space of tension and danger. Indeed, it is only the redoubtable matriarch, Pearl, who opens the front door with a flourish. Mary Beth Haralovich has written about the way in which the *mise-en-scène* in sitcoms serves to situate the social and economic status of its central characters (2003, p.73). Haralovich argues that lower working-class status is connoted by one or two small rooms which contain ‘outmoded’ furnishings and appliances (2003, p.73). The Foster family clearly fall into this category. Their

cramped and crowded conditions make it hard to accommodate their various (and often conflicting) needs. The living room is frequently occupied by six people (Mr and Mrs Foster, their three children and a family friend). Thus in most episodes, Pearl Foster clears the dining table in order that her artist son, Sonny, can paint, or her husband can read the newspaper. The unreliability of cheap or out-of-date consumer goods is an ongoing preoccupation in the Foster family household. In series one, episode three ('God's business is good'), the Fosters' small black and white television blows up while the family are watching it. In this way then, the *mise-en-scène* goes some way towards making a statement about the privations faced by black communities in 1970s Britain. Social and cultural exclusion is also expressed in some of the dialogue. Samuel Foster bemoans the poverty endured by his family, 'Everything we own is on HP [hire purchase]'. His wife, Pearl, worries continually about 'the children's future' and it is a running gag throughout the series that any money that Samuel manages to acquire (either legitimately or illegitimately) will be seized by Pearl to save for 'university, art school and dancing lessons'.

However, Darrell Newton has argued that the ongoing subtext of *The Fosters* was that 'no matter what the circumstances, [the family] had 'good times' to pull them through; a notion that deflected issues of poverty and economic disparity' (2011, p.167). Certainly, some viewers seem to have been upset by the way in which *The Fosters* seemingly glossed over the pressures faced by black communities. Norman Beaton recalled a conversation with a group of young black men he met at a party in Clapham: 'And that *Fosters* you been in', another chimed in, 'that don't show the black community like it is. It's foolishness' ... 'You're a fucking Uncle Tom', said another, 'You don't represent any of we' (Beaton, 1986, p.206). Nonetheless, *The*

Fosters at least attempted to depict black family life with a degree of sympathy, largely due to the strong performances of its black cast.

The next 'race sitcom' to appear on television was *Mind Your Language* (1977-1979, LWT). If the *Fosters* had represented an (albeit flawed) attempt to make a sitcom in which black characters were laughed *with* rather than *at*, *Mind Your Language's* humour was in the same vein as earlier sitcoms such as *Curry and Chips*. *Mind Your Language* had the same producer as *Love Thy Neighbour* and *The Fosters* (Stuart Allen). Its script was written by Vince Powell, who alongside Harry Driver, had penned *Love Thy Neighbour*. Like *Love Thy Neighbour*, *Mind Your Language* revolved around a single joke; in this case the 'problem' of teaching English to a class of multi-racial adults. A long-running and popular sitcom, *Mind Your Language*, 'set up the perfect opportunity to show the differences between various foreigners' (Malik, 2002, p.96). The teacher (played by Barry Evans), is the only white British person in the cast, and the audience is invited to identify with his 'difficulties' in dealing with people with 'different' lifestyles and customs. As with other 'race sitcoms', *Mind Your Language* has a preoccupation with setting the boundaries of 'British identity' in a multicultural society. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a comedy which 'relentlessly exploited' racial 'stereotypes' came in for a high degree of criticism from bodies such as the Institute of Race Relations (Pratt, n.d., Mills 2005, p. 101). However, as I demonstrate in my extended case study of *Love Thy Neighbour* (part 2.3), the sitcom was strongly defended at an institutional level, largely on the grounds that 'it would take the sting out of racism'. There seems to have been a similar institutional response to *Mind Your Language*. Indeed, Humphrey Barclay, then Head of Comedy at LWT, was apparently of the opinion

that ‘seeing different races on screen would familiarise and naturalise them to a white majority viewing public’ (Malik, 2002, p.96).

In common with many other 1970s ‘race sitcoms’, *Mixed Blessings* was predicated on a single ‘joke’ – in this case the ‘shock’ for the families concerned when a white man, Thomas Simpson (Christopher Blake) marries a black woman, Susan Lambert (Muriel Odunton). However, whereas the majority of the ‘race sitcoms’ are concerned with working-class life, *Mixed Blessings* is unusual insofar as it depicts two middle-class families. It is interesting to speculate why this is the case. It is made clear in the first episode that Thomas and Susan have met at university and have married without the consent or knowledge of their parents; indeed in this and subsequent episodes, both families struggle to come to terms with the idea of a ‘mixed’ marriage. I would suggest that *Mixed Blessings*’ subtext is that it is only within the liberal context of university (a predominantly liberal middle-class institution) that such an ‘unconventional’ match could easily be made. Significantly, the viewer is frequently reminded that Susan studied sociology – thus the double ‘joke’ here is that sociology is a left-leaning, ‘trendy’ subject that may lead to unconventional behaviour in those who study it *and* that the marriage itself is something of a sociological experiment.

Like other sitcoms discussed in this section, *Mixed Blessings* has an ambivalent attitude towards race which arguably allows for polysemic readings of the text. Indeed as Ali Jaafar has perceptively written: ‘*Mixed Blessings* is a mixed bag of a sitcom. While its set-up points to its integrationist intentions, one has only to look at the title to note the [white] writer’s own ambiguous feelings’ (Jaafar, n.d.). The

opening scene of episode one is typical of the show's tone. Thomas and Susan arrive home from the registry office and discuss the task of breaking the news of their recent nuptials to their respective families:

Thomas: We've got married. That was the easy part. What am I going to say to my parents?

Susan: Well, my Dad won't let you through the door.

Thomas: Here we are Mrs Simpson.

Susan: I'm the blushing bride.

Thomas: Are you blushing? How can I tell?

Whilst both Thomas and Susan foresee opposition from their parents, it is Susan's blackness that is explicitly commented on (and laughed at by the studio audience). Later, Thomas asks Susan's brother, Winston, if he would like to visit Thomas' parents:

Thomas Simpson: Are you coming with us [to my parents' house]?

Winston Lambert: No, it's probably best that they only see one black at a time or they'll think we are all moving in.

This line about black immigration, delivered by a black character, gets a huge laugh from the studio audience. The ambivalent nature of the text makes it possible for audiences to either read Winston's comment as a satire on scaremongering media reports about immigration *or* as simply reinforcing their existing racist notions about 'black overcrowding'.

Much of the action in *Mixed Blessings* takes place in Thomas' parents' home (not least because Thomas' Aunt Dorothy, who lives in the same town, eventually rents the couple her basement flat). We are told that Edward and Annie Simpson (Sylvia Kay and George Waring) live in Sussex, although the name of the town is not stipulated. By contrast, Susan's parents are situated firmly in London's Richmond.

The fact that this is a middle-class area of London and not the inner-city or a down-at-heel suburb is commented on in the first episode:

Thomas Simpson: You'll have to come with us to meet the in-laws

Annie Simpson [surprised and worried]: Is it far?

Thomas Simpson: Don't worry, it's not Jamaica – they live in Richmond

Annie Simpson: Really? I always thought Richmond was such a nice place

Edward Simpson: What your mother means is we didn't realise the blacks had got as far as Richmond.

Whilst *Mixed Blessings* does not use the overtly racist language of *Love thy Neighbour* or *Curry and Chips*, it is similarly concerned with black immigration and the fear of how this will impact on broader society. Moreover, much of *Mixed Blessings*' action revolves around struggles to create boundaries around British identity. When Annie Simpson eventually meets Susan's mother, Matilda Lambert (Carmen Munroe), she comments that 'we English always like a cup of tea to calm us down in times of stress'. 'Yes', replies Matilda tartly, 'we English do'. Both families are worried about the possible implications of a 'half-caste' grandchild and although the final episode of *Mixed Blessings* concludes fairly harmoniously, the viewer is left in no doubt that there will be trouble ahead for Thomas and Susan.

Ali Jaafar has commented that the overall message and tone of *Mixed Blessings* was so muddled that it was 'unclear whether it [was] ... the prejudices of the supporting characters or the very idea that a white man and a black woman [could] live in matrimonial harmony which was being held up for ridicule' (Jaafar, n.d.). Certainly Carmen Munroe was dissatisfied with *Mixed Blessings*. Munroe felt that *Mixed Blessings* should 'have been a good situation comedy with some hard-hitting social elements' but that it did not go far enough (Munroe taken from Pines, 1992, p.63).

For Monroe, *Mixed Blessings* failed to be an edgy but sympathetic portrayal of British race relations and instead simply re-trod the ground of earlier sitcoms such as *Love Thy Neighbour*. In short, the sitcom allowed race politics to reach popular audiences. However, the often problematic ambivalence of the form allowed audiences to take polysemic reading positions.

Soap Opera

As has been noted, BBC Pebble Mill was not only a creative stimulus for single plays and drama, it also gave rise to an all black soap opera. *Empire Road* ran for two series from October 1978 to October 1979. Shown on BBC 2, it was ‘hailed [in the press] as the black *Coronation Street*’ (Beaton, 1986, p.200). *Empire Road* was written by Michael Abbensetts and produced by Peter Ansorge. In interview, Ansorge recalled that having successfully collaborated on *Black Christmas*, he and Abbensetts were keen to work together on a new project (Ansorge, 2011). Abbensetts proposed a series with black and Asian characters, to be set in Birmingham’s Handsworth, which he envisaged would have ‘echoes in soap opera’ (Ansorge, 2011). Ansorge and Abbensetts approached the Head of Department at Pebble Mill Drama, David Rose, who subsequently pitched the idea to the Controller of BBC2, Brian Wenham (Ansorge, 2011). Evidently Wenham was highly encouraging about *Empire Road* (Ansorge, 2011). Ansorge went on to explain that Wenham was just one of a ‘generation of television executives’ working in the BBC in the 1970s who was anxious to expand television’s horizons: ‘[They] were very ambitious for the form. Not just the form of drama but for what television could

achieve. Although they were perhaps what you would call ‘establishment’, it didn’t mean they lacked culture or understanding’ (Ansorge, 2011).

The idea of the BBC in the 1970s as a liberal institution, certainly where fiction was concerned, was also reinforced by *A Hole in Babylon*’s producer, Graham Benson (see part 2.5). Nevertheless, Ansorge did experience a certain amount of prejudice about the prospect of making an ‘all-black soap’ from some quarters. As he recalled in interview:

I do remember in pre-production, I still don’t quite understand why, but a drama producer in London phoned me up ... and for some reason had read about the fact that we were doing this, and he said ‘you must be mad’. And I said, ‘What do you mean?’ And he said ‘well there aren’t any black actors in this country and those that there are won’t turn up for rehearsal on time’ (Ansorge, 2011).

The central family in *Empire Road* is headed by a successful businessman, Everton Bennett, played by Norman Beaton. Michael Abbensetts stated that he drew inspiration for the character of Bennett and others in the series from his own friends and family:

I based the Everton Bennett character ... on an uncle of mine, and he also had a friend who stammered, like the Walter character in the series. I wanted those two to have a relationship that was funny, but sometimes serious as well ... I would listen to my uncle and his friend talking about things, and I put a lot of that into *Empire Road* (Abbensetts in Pines, 1992, p.134).

Norman Beaton has written that the key preoccupation for the characters on *Empire Road* is not ‘the ghetto conflict of bricks and stones and petrol bombs’, rather it is the ‘essentially middle-class conflict of thwarted ambition’ (1986, p.175). To this end, *Race Today* commented somewhat scathingly that:

Michael Abbensetts ... obviously believes that people rather than politics make the world go round and the ratings go up. *Empire Road* therefore concentrates on how the West Indians

and Asians in the street relate to each other. Their relationship to white society does not come in for detailed examination (Rugg, 1979, p.19).

However, for Norman Beaton, a major strength of *Empire Road* was that it was not a polemical piece. Instead, Abbensetts sought to portray a facet of black lived experience that was largely missing from television. As Beaton commented:

the conflicts black people are not a prerogative of the front line. It would be dangerous to espouse the view that the only interesting black people inhabit the ghetto. Interesting black people come from every stratum in society. They work hard, pay taxes ... own their own homes and cars ... send their children to universities (Beaton, 1986, p.174).

While not overtly political, from the outset, *Empire Road* did contain references to racism and racial inequality. Indeed, in the very first episode of *Empire Road* 'The Street Party', the teenage Rastafarian Royston (Vincent Taylor) complains bitterly that 'white people won't give us work'.

In a 1979 article for *Radio Times*, Abbensetts explained why Handsworth was a more appealing setting than London:

It struck me that the atmosphere [in Handsworth] was very different from London. It was more relaxed. Everybody seemed to have more time, and it was easy to see what people's problems were. It was very mixed: Blacks, Whites and Asians living next door to each other ... All that happens in London but [here] ... I could see it in greater clarity (Abbensetts taken from Phillips, 1979, n.p.).

It must also be noted that this choice of location was more broadly linked to a production ethos at BBC Pebble Mill which moved drama out of the studio, away from London and into the 'English regions' (Plater, 2010). To this end, whilst mainly filmed in the studio, 'a few days on each episode' were set aside for location filming with an OB camera (Ansorge, 2011). Handsworth's Westbourne Road was used for the bulk of the location shooting (Phillips, 1979, n.p.). This real-life location clearly had advantages. When Alex Marshall, *Empire Road's* first director, filmed the street party that formed a set piece in the first episode of series one, she

was able to recruit some members of the local community as extras (Phillips, 1979, n.p.). Westbourne Road was dressed with flags and bunting and local residents were encouraged to treat the event as a real street party (Phillips, 1979, n.p.). Evidently there was some local resistance to the filming of series one. Norman Beaton recalled that a man approached him in Westbourne Road and told him that *Empire Road* should be filmed elsewhere as ‘we are all respectable here’ (cited in Phillips, 1979, n.p.). Perhaps this concern was due to a preponderance of television programmes in the 1970s concerned with depicting ‘black crime’ or ‘race problems’ (such as the aforementioned *Gangsters*).

The first series of *Empire Road* had only five episodes and viewing figures were hampered by the fact that it was shown on BBC2 at 6.50pm in the ‘Further Education slot’ (Khan, 1979, n.p.). Nevertheless, it was seemingly well-received by press and viewers (Beaton, 1986, p.200). *Radio Times* reported that it presented ‘West Indians and Asians as ordinary people rather than as problems or clowns’ (Ansorge cited in Phillips, 1979, n.p.). However, it was not without critics (Beaton, 1986, p.200). Akua Rugg, writing in *Race Today*, complained about a central storyline concerning an ‘unlikely romance’ between a black boy, Marcus (Wayne Laryea) and an Asian girl, Ranjanaa (Nalini Moonasar) (1979, p.19). Even Norman Beaton felt that ‘the device of an interracial romance, where a young British-born West-Indian and an Asian girl fall in love and eventually get married’ was unrealistic (1986, p.175). ‘In the real world’, Beaton wryly concluded, ‘the girl’s father would have killed her’ (1986, p.175). Rugg was also critical of what she perceived as a lack of authenticity in the corporeal and linguistic performances of some of the actors involved in the first series of *Empire Road*. Although singling out Norman

Beaton's character, Everton Bennett, as 'a joy to watch', Rugg complained that other characters supposedly 'fresh from Guyana' did not speak with Guyanese accents and dialects (1979, p.19). Rugg also took issue with the way in which the young Rastafarian characters were depicted in the soap. She complained that they were made to seem 'ridiculous rather than rebellious', not least because one of them was 'sporting a Little Richard wig' (Rugg, 1979, p. 19). This was also commented on by Norman Beaton who recalled a conversation that he had with some black youths when *Empire Road* was first transmitted: 'You mean to say you can't get a couple of real Rasta actors to play the boys in your series?' (1986, p.206).

Perhaps in response to such criticisms, and the fact that he was given ten episodes rather than five, Michael Abbensetts wrote some tougher storylines into the second series – although he was careful to retain the programme's humour (Khan, 1979, n.p). Additionally, *Empire Road* was moved to the peak time slot of 8pm, which allowed for stronger material. In a 1979 article, Corrine Skinner-Carter, who played Hortense, the put-upon wife of Everton Bennett, stated that:

I didn't like the first three episodes [of series 1] for a start. The trouble was that Abbensetts had only five episodes and he was trying to push everything in. And there was a lack in the first series – the nasty side of it, you could say. The pressures on the black community are shown more clearly in the new series (Skinner-Carter taken from Khan, 1979, n.p.).

In this way, series two sees Everton Bennett denied a bank loan by a white bank manager on the grounds that: 'West Indians are a bad business risk' ('Godfadder at Bay', tx October 18 1979). This is despite the fact that Bennett has been 'living in Britain for 20 years, has acquired a supermarket and four houses which he lets' (Rugg, 1979, p.19). Later in the episode, a character receives a series of anonymous threatening racist telephone calls. When, in 'Blues in the Night' (tx September 27

1979), Miss May (Rosa Roberts) holds loud weekend 'Blues parties' with her friends, her white neighbour shouts: 'They're guests in our country. They must learn to behave as we do'. In 'Streets of Thornley' (tx October 1979), an Asian-owned sweet shop is attacked by a racist group of youths.

By the second series of *Empire Road*, Peter Ansorge was also keen that the soap should have a black director: 'I just thought, we had black actors, we had a black writer ... And really Horace Ové was the only one [black director]. I [saw] ... his film *Pressure* ... and what struck me was what a good filmmaker he was' (Ansorge, 2011). In interview, Horace Ové explained that he made it clear to Peter Ansorge that he wanted to take a new approach with the filming of the three episodes that he was to make for *Empire Road*: 'I wanted to make it as real as possible and put the actors back into the street' (Ové, 2009). According to Ansorge, Ové rejected the idea of the OB camera set-up in which practitioners were encouraged to think of the location as a 'mini-studio' (Ansorge, 2011). Instead he chose to use technology commonly used in film such as the crane and handheld cameras (as he would also do with *A Hole in Babylon*) (Pines, 1992, p.124). He then shot the scene frame by frame rather than using continuous recording (Ansorge, 2011). Ové recalled that this was challenging for the technicians who grumbled that this method of filming was 'difficult' and unprofessional (Ové, 2009). However, as Ansorge commented, the end result was highly authentic and firmly rooted in its Handsworth location:

What he [Ové] got from that [process] was a filmic quality, and a sense of the streets of Handsworth, the people ... And Horace was also very observant about the environment around him. So if he saw something, if he saw some kids in the crowd doing something that was interesting, he would incorporate it into the filmmaking ... so it had a sort of root in the place of Handsworth ... that perhaps some of the other directors didn't quite get (Ansorge, 2011).

Ové's quest for realism in *Empire Road* also extended to the performances that he elicited from the actors, many of whom had backgrounds in black theatre (Ové, 2009:Ansorge, 2011). In the 1970s, it was usual in television production for directors to work with actors prior to filming and to occupy the control room while the footage was being shot (Beaton, 1986, p.214). Only a floor manager remained with the actors while they were being filmed (Beaton, 1986, p.214). Ové was keen to remove the physical distance that the director had from the actors during shooting which necessitated the use of control room intercom rather than face-to-face interaction between actor and director (Ové taken from Pines, 1992, p.124). For Ové, this resulted in a stilted and artificial acting style (Ové, 2009). To this end, he took the unconventional route of directing the actors on the studio floor (Beaton, 1986, p.214). As with *Pressure*, Ové included a certain amount of unscripted material. Norman Beaton commented that: '[Horace Ové] was with his actors creating and inventing as we went along' (1986, p. 214). Beaton recalled that throughout the filming, Ové 'persuaded his actors to inform their performances with ... broad black and West Indian attitudes, body movement and gaiety' (1986, p.214). In the same way, Wayne Laryea (who played Marcus Bennett) stated that 'since Horace was from the Caribbean, he added different shades [to our performances]' (taken from Khan, 1979, n.p.). This is important when considering the accusations of bodily and linguistic 'inauthenticity' levelled at the first series.

Despite respectable audience figures for a BBC2 programme (estimated at around 2 million viewers per episode for the second series), no further episodes were commissioned (Newton, 2011, p.159: Beaton, 1986, p.214). Norman Beaton wrote of his frustration about this decision: '*Empire Road* was the only indigenous drama series on television catering to the specific needs of the Afro-Caribbean community

... *Empire Road* was abandoned. To many of us it was a grossly insensitive decision' (Beaton, 1986, p.214). In interview, Peter Ansorge explained that *Empire Road* largely ended because of pecuniary factors:

there's a certain budget, if we had decided to do a third series of *Empire Road*, it would have meant that something new in the pipeline – in this case *The History Man* –couldn't have been made ... so unless the BBC had said here's an extra sum of money ... which ... [in a] recession, they weren't inclined to (Ansorge, 2011).

Ansorge recalled that at the time he had also felt strongly that 'following on from *Empire Road*, similar [projects] would happen elsewhere'(Ansorge, 2011).

However, as he was to go on to comment somewhat ruefully, 'but they didn't [happen] and haven't outside of Channel 4' (Ansorge, 2011).

The example of *Empire Road* once again illustrates the way in which a sympathetic liberal producer could enable black writers and directors to find a distinctive voice on television. Working on a soap opera provided an opportunity for black practitioners to reach sitcom audiences. However, whereas sitcoms (to differing degrees) problematised race, *Empire Road* demonstrated that black experience could be addressed seriously in a popular television format.

Conclusion

As this survey has demonstrated, issues of race were addressed across a wide range of middle-brow and popular film and television texts in the 1970s. That race was explored in such a variety of genres is indicative of the extent to which notions of multiculturalism, race relations, immigration and national identity were contested within culture and society at large during the 1970s. To be sure, when minority voices achieve (albeit limited) access across a number of creative forms, not only is

this indicative of sympathy within some quarters of the establishment, it is also evidence of the urgency of the socio-political climate. A central concern of this thesis is the ways in which popular fictional forms were able to address the crisis outlined in part 2.1. Whilst all the films and television surveyed afforded a level of black expression, the extent of this varied greatly. Feature films, single plays and the soap opera generally allowed for a higher degree of black agency, although even within these forms there is compromise. Certainly independent feature film, BBC Pebble Mill and the BBC *Play for Today* strand were important sites of innovation for black voices. LWT was largely responsible for the ‘race sitcoms’ of the 1970s – all of these programmes had white writers and many were deeply problematic in terms of representation. The sitcoms clearly reached the broadest popular audience, but were at best ambivalent about race politics in the polysemic readings they offered. However, as the example of *The Fosters* illustrates, strong ensemble acting provided a further locus of black agency and creative expression. Indeed, even the controversial *Love Thy Neighbour* was evidently read by some black viewers in terms of its ‘black stars’ (see part 2.3). This survey also reveals the high degree of practitioner cross-over in film, television and theatre. This range of work presents something of the complexity surrounding issues of black authorship, agency, authenticity and expression. These matters will be explored in a more applied way in the case studies which follow. These three examples serve also to illustrate the range of primary archival and interview sources which underpins this study, and to demonstrate aspects of the mixed methodology required to map this contested cultural history.

2.3 – Case Study 1: *Love Thy Neighbour*

Introduction

This case study draws on audience and institutional correspondence as well as an audience survey housed at the IBA archives at Bournemouth University in order to examine the reception history of the controversial but popular sitcom, *Love Thy Neighbour*. The archival material examined in this section provides rare evidence of the ways in which audiences responded to a 1970s ‘race sitcom’. As such, it gives new insights into the problematic readings that the series was able to sustain, and into popular and institutional discourses.

Uncovering the reception histories of 1970s fictional television programmes and feature films concerning black Britain is notoriously difficult. In many cases (such as *Empire Road*) audience letters or surveys about particular texts have simply not survived. Beyond the archive, rich reception data can be gleaned through the use of in-depth retrospective interviews with audience members (see the case of the film *Black Joy* in part 3.4 of this thesis). The archival material pertaining to *Love Thy Neighbour*’s reception history has the obvious advantage of immediacy. Some audience members clearly wrote to or telephoned the IBA within hours of a particular episode of the sitcom being aired, and the IBA survey was undertaken at the height of *Love Thy Neighbour*’s popularity (at least in terms of viewing figures). Additionally, given that each letter in the archive (written from the programme’s inception in 1972 until its demise in 1976) received a written reply from the IBA, the correspondence reveals a compelling (and frequently conflicting) exchange between audience and institution. Thus, this case study demonstrates the ways in which archival material can be utilised to shed new light on the complex reception history

of this controversial sitcom and serves as an exemplar of the importance of historical contextualisation when examining audience response.

***Love Thy Neighbour*, audiences and 1970s ‘race sitcoms’**

Active audience theory posits that audiences make polysemic readings of texts often divorced from the original intentions of the programme makers (Hobson, 2000, p.603). Moreover, Brett Mills suggests that sitcom is an open text which allows for ‘alternative readings’ and negotiation on the part of audiences (2009, p.107).

Arguably, the practices of negotiating contemporary issues of race and identity were stimulated in the case of a sitcom in which racial difference was *itself* the pretext for the comedy. Despite the formulaic structure of the show, it can be seen to have performed surprisingly complex cultural tasks at the level of reception. The hegemonic function of television is well documented. As Andy Medhurst explains with reference to the political nature of situation comedy: ‘If you want to understand the preoccupations and power structures of a society or social group, there are few better ways than studying what it laughs at. Comedy is all about power: there are those who laugh and those who are laughed at’ (Medhurst, 1989, p.15). Taken at face value then, sitcoms could be seen to simply reinforce ‘the ideological boundaries of a culture’ (Medhurst, 1989, p.15). However, as Medhurst argues, the sometimes contradictory and ambivalent nature of the genre can be ‘disruptive of the social order’ in surprising ways (1989, p.15). Like *Till Death Us Do Part*, *Love Thy Neighbour* was ambivalent in its attitude towards race, which seemingly allowed audiences to hold a number of opposing views.

***Love Thy Neighbour* and 1970s debates about race and race relations**

TV Times' description of the first episode of *Love Thy Neighbour* (broadcast April 13 1972) neatly sums up the dubious pretext of the sitcom:

You can choose your friends ... you can't choose your neighbours. Eddie and Joan Booth are no exception. Hard-working, ordinary people with a mortgage ... they can rub along with most people, but when [black] Mr and Mrs Reynolds move in next door, well it's quite a *shock* [my emphasis] ('New Series', 1972, n.p.).

Over the course of eight series, the verbally (and sometimes physically) aggressive 'racially motivated antagonism' between the white working-class socialist Eddie Booth and his black Conservative-supporting neighbour, Bill Reynolds, overshadowed the contrasting harmonious relationship between their wives, Joan and Barbie (Pratt, n.d.).

At an institutional level, *Love Thy Neighbour* was firmly categorised as 'light entertainment', a genre that, as Richard Dyer notes, 'defines its job in terms of providing escape' (1973, p.23). Nevertheless, *Love Thy Neighbour's* popularity came at a high price for certain sections of the black community who reported an increase in racist name-calling and taunts whenever the programme was broadcast. As a Race Relations Board member, Tania Rose, commented in 1975, 'I haven't met a black person who isn't offended to hell by it' (cited in Bennion, 1975, p.256). However, the simple dichotomy between the popularity of *Love Thy Neighbour* as light entertainment and Rose's condemnation masks a much more complex picture of how a popular entertainment programme negotiated ideas about race at a time of social and political change in Britain. It also perhaps highlights the way in which critical responses to *Love Thy Neighbour* were polarised as a result of its textual ambivalence.

***Love Thy Neighbour* correspondence at the IBA archives**

As previously stated, the collection of audience letters concerning *Love Thy Neighbour* and the written responses that each received from the IBA, cover the period of the programme's transmission (1972 -76). As such, they provide a unique insight into 1970s audience and institutional discourse about the series. However, Aniko Bodroghkozy's examination of representations of race and gender in the US sitcom *Julia* (1968-71), raises some important methodological considerations about using viewers' letters to interrogate audience response to a programme.

Bodroghkozy reminds us that 'letter writers tend to be a particularly motivated group of television viewers' and that there is no way of knowing if those viewers who choose *not* to write, share same the opinions and concerns as their letter-writing counterparts (2003, p.134). Moreover, given the fragmented nature of television archives for the 1970s, it is not possible to find out whether *Love Thy Neighbour* prompted an unusual number of responses compared to other popular shows of the decade. Mindful of Bodroghkozy then, while I do not claim that the letters in the IBA archive can be 'representative of the [*Love Thy Neighbour*] audience as a whole', they (and the institutional responses to them) do provide what she calls 'clues and traces', offering some insight into the contested racial landscape of the early 1970s (2003, p.134).

Some complaints levelled at *Love Thy Neighbour* are surprising, especially when read some 40 years later. Throughout its five-year transmission, for example, a steady stream of viewers wrote (and sometimes telephoned Thames Television) to protest at the use of 'bad language' in the programme. Typical of these letters is one

addressed to Thames Television's Programme Director from a male viewer in Reading: 'In watching *Love Thy Neighbour* ... I felt the use of the word 'bloody' was quite unnecessary even once, let alone five times. We and the many thousands of viewers who think as we do, don't like words like this in the intimacy of our homes' (Wales, 1972). Several internal memos document telephone calls from viewers upset by swearing in the programme. In September 1972, the IBA logged one such verbal complaint from a white retired female: '[...] of the Chelsea Pensioner Club, London complained of the disgusting language used in *Love Thy Neighbour* (Bloody)' (Memo, 1972, 22 September). Although there were complaints about racist language from some letter-writers, it is interesting that not one of the correspondents who complained about the use of the word 'bloody' in *Love Thy Neighbour* mentioned the frequent use of words such as 'sambo', 'nig-nog' or 'darkie' in the programme. The IBA's response to complaints about expletive 'bloody' was as follows:

The companies have been asked to exercise care and responsibility to eliminate unnecessary swearing ... this word has come into such common usage that it cannot be said to be offensive to the generality of the audience ... we are sorry if you or any other viewer was offended (Memo, 1972, 12 October).

Such was the frequency of complaints about 'bloody' being uttered by characters in the sitcom, that one IBA member wrote a memo instructing his secretary to write what he termed as 'the usual brief paragraph on bad language' in response to a viewer's concerns about the use of the word (Memo, 1972, 12 October). In the same way, some audience members who upbraided Eddie Booth for being a 'bad influence' on impressionable viewers, chose not to fixate on his boorish racism but on his heavy smoking. A Devon housewife wrote to the Head of the IBA in May 1972 complaining about how irresponsible it was to have a key character in a

popular television programme with such an unhealthy habit. She concluded that whilst *Love Thy Neighbour* was enjoyable, Eddie's smoking was a 'health hazard' to broader society (Memo, 1972, 7 May).

Other letters seemingly reflect what a report concerning Race Relations and Independent Television called a growing atmosphere of 'mutual racial suspicion' in 1970s Britain (Glencross, 1976, p.1). Some correspondents, who identified themselves as being white, complained that the makers of *Love Thy Neighbour* tipped the scales so far in the favour of the black couple, Bill and Barbie Reynolds (Nina Baden-Semper) that it was the *white* viewer who was discriminated against. As one man opined in a letter to Richard Luce MP: 'I consider *Love Thy Neighbour* to be a breach of the Race Relations Act, I think it to be prejudiced against white people. The programme made white people appear inferior in intelligence and complete fools compared with coloured people' (Austen, 1974). A white female viewer from Streatham in London was even upset by the way in which the *mise-en-scène* in *Love Thy Neighbour* served to portray the white couple Eddie and Joan as 'uneducated, scruffy [and] untidy' and the black couple Bill and Barbie as clever and sophisticated: '[the white couple's] home [is] untidy full of outdated furnishings while the black couple next door [have] modern furnishings, teak woodwork, arty pictures etc ... I would like to put it to the Race Relations Board' (Joy, 1972).

It is interesting that those correspondents who write in this vein make explicit reference to race relations legislation in their letters (as does Eddie Booth, who frequently rings the 'Race Relations Board'; something which would come back to haunt Thames Television's then Director of Programmes, Jeremy Isaacs, as will be

discussed later in this case-study). Arguably, this preoccupation with race relations policy and the ‘fairness’ of racial representation on the part of certain white letter-writers can be framed within socio-political discourses of the time. As I have detailed in part 2.1, the early 1970s witnessed a growing realisation in some quarters that the 1968 Race Relations Act was ‘relatively inefficient’ and of limited practical use to victims of racial discrimination (Bleich, 2003, p.88). Whilst pressure groups such as the Runnymede Trust campaigned tirelessly for improved race relations legislation, a certain amount of scaremongering took place both in Parliament and the right-wing press: namely that alterations to race relations policy could bring about discrimination against the white population (Bleich, 2003, p.90). This irrational and unfounded fear perhaps gained further currency when the Labour government came back to power in 1974 and made it clear that they intended to make ‘significant changes’ to the 1968 Act which would, for the first time, incorporate ‘indirect discrimination protections and positive action’ into race relations legislation (Bleich, 2003, p.89). Despite the evidence of popular fears, the IBA tended to make light of any complaints they received that accused *Love Thy Neighbour* of racial discrimination against white people, as is illustrated in this characteristic response from its Viewer Correspondence Department: ‘We are sorry that you have been upset by the way the ‘white’ family is portrayed ... However, we would like to point out that this series is meant to be a light-hearted situation comedy, not a serious documentary’ (Chaplin, 1972).

Both white and black viewers alike did, nonetheless, contact the IBA and Thames Television to complain about the racist language used in the programme. These letters and calls tended to focus on the negative impact that exposure to such

language had on the behaviour of children. This was not an insignificant issue when one considers that at the height of its popularity, *Love Thy Neighbour* was watched by ‘two million children under the age of fifteen’ (IBA Special Report, 1975, p.2). Given that the first series of the sitcom was afforded a weekday ‘family teatime slot’ (Thursday, 7pm) in the schedules, and was not at any point shown later than 8.30pm, the fact that *Love Thy Neighbour* was watched by so many children is perhaps unsurprising (‘New series’, 1972, n.p.). The archive reveals that from the first transmission of series one in 1972, this audience demographic was a very real concern for some correspondents. A white housewife from West London telephoned the IBA’s press office in October 1972 to complain that having watched *Love Thy Neighbour*, her son had repeated racist language in the street. Neville Clarke, the IBA’s programme administrative officer responded thus:

We are sorry that you were offended particularly as it led your child to repeat it in the street. The intention of the series is to help black and white people get on better with each other. Some people do call coloured people by nicknames and the idea is that by using them in this programme it can take the sting out of them (Clarke, 1972b).

The idea that using racist language in *Love Thy Neighbour* for ‘comic’ purposes would somehow neutralise the impact of the words and actively facilitate good race relations, was a line taken by the IBA throughout the programme’s transmission. This was despite receiving several letters from black parents who drew direct correlations between the broadcasting of *Love Thy Neighbour* and racist abuse directed at their children. A black father wrote to Lord Aylestone, the IBA’s chairman:

Lately, the racial abuse hurled at the characters in the programme has been an unfortunate education to the children at my son’s school ... my son has learned with a shock, from the names hurled at him, that he is apparently not as normal as those he played ... happily with until now (Sinnadurai, 1973).

Whilst claiming that he ‘shared a concern’ about the treatment of the correspondent’s son, the IBA’s chairman was quick to defend the intentions of *Love Thy Neighbour*:

This series was initiated with the good intention of trying to assist Race Relations by treating the issues with humour ... The programmes were therefore designed to promote racial harmony and not to accentuate racial conflict ... the series is deemed to have helped (Lord Aylestone, 1973).

Sometimes children *themselves* wrote and complained about the effect that the racist language used in *Love Thy Neighbour* had on their peers. An eleven-year-old white girl from Bournemouth made the following perceptive comments to *TV Times* in 1972:

Our school has just received black children. Some other children are calling them Sambos and Nignogs ... they have been watching the comedy series *Love Thy Neighbour*. Do you think that the name calling goes a bit too far and encourages others to copy them? (Harrison, 1972).

Perhaps aware of the politically sensitive nature of correspondence such as this, *TV Times* forwarded the letter to the IBA where it was answered by Neville Clarke:

Thank you for telling us what happened at school. The *Love Thy Neighbour* series is intended to help black and white people get on better with each other. It is a fact that some people do call coloured people by nicknames like nig-nog and that the use of such nicknames in the series is intended to take the sting out of them ... it is very often possible to use such nicknames with people provided they are friends of ours ... You are of course right that if some children are calling black children nig-nogs without being friendly, then it can be very hurtful (Clarke, 1972a).

Here, as in other correspondence concerning *Love Thy Neighbour*, the IBA took the curious line that offence (or not) caused by racist language was simply a matter of contextualisation. As Clarke told the schoolchild, it is acceptable to use racist names and terminology provided that the black person in question is a friend. Once again, the implication is that in ‘taking the sting out of racism’ by dint of comic banter,

Love Thy Neighbour performed an important social function ultimately outweighing any immediate harm.

Even as *Love Thy Neighbour* entered its final series, the IBA continued to emphasise that the programme's race humour was essentially harmless, despite viewer letters and critical responses to the contrary. When, in January 1976, a white teacher from Bristol complained that the programme increased racist name-calling among children in her care, Michael Gilles, an IBA programme administrative officer, wrote assuring her that: 'we have received few complaints about it, either from or on behalf of coloured people. This may be because Eddie Booth's prejudices are always made to appear so ridiculous' (Gilles, 1976).

Whereas many of the missives in the IBA archive concern general complaints about the series as a whole, one episode in particular, broadcast on February 4 1974, attracted a handful of critical letters from some of the Muslim community. The episode in question contains a scene, set in a maternity ward, in which two expectant mothers are told by matron that they 'must be Muslim' as four, instead of two, husbands appeared to be waiting for them. Unsurprisingly, this misrepresentation of the Muslim faith was deemed highly offensive, especially given the conflicted race relations of the time. In addition to correspondence from private individuals, the IBA also received a letter from the Union of Muslim Organisations of UK and Eire voicing their concerns:

A disparaging remark was made on Islam, giving an impression to viewers that a Muslim woman may have any number of husbands. We are sure that you will agree ... to the extent of revulsion and anger that this irresponsible and false remark would have caused to Muslims ... Secondly, this would have given an impression to non-Muslim audiences that Muslims

are a semi-barbaric people. You might imagine the bad effect that this false impression could create on the fragile race relations in this country (Pasha, 1974).

Even in the face of a complaint from another institution, the IBA chose to play down the broader socio-political ramifications of an inaccurate and offensive representation of a minority group:

We have been in touch with Thames Television who are responsible for this series and it is clear that the remark made by the matron of which you complain did not arise from the Muslim way of life. It was intended as a kind of joke in which the fact that some Muslim husbands have more than one wife was transferred to the two women in hospital. I am quite certain there was no intention to ridicule the Muslim faith or Muslims in general, but I would agree with you that as a joke it was a rather silly one (Young, 1974).

What is interesting is that Brian Young, writing on behalf of the IBA, did not in any part of his letter explicitly address the Union of Muslim Organisations' complaint that the programme could be detrimental to Britain's already fragile race relations. Instead, Young emphasised the fictional and ephemeral nature of *Love Thy Neighbour* with his comment that 'the remark...did not arise from the Muslim way of life'. Young further undermined the seriousness of the complaint with his concluding comment: '...as a joke it was rather a silly one'. Such an attitude about humour and popular culture perhaps betrays contemporaneous institutional prejudices and cultural snobbishness, in suggesting that low-brow forms were essentially innocuous and not to be taken too seriously.

IBA report - '*Love Thy Neighbour* – What Coloured Immigrant Viewers Think' (1975)

Although in their letters to the public, the IBA continued to stand by the assertion that *Love Thy Neighbour* was a light-hearted comedy, which, in many cases, actively promoted racial harmony, the archive reveals something else. Behind the scenes, the IBA were growing increasingly concerned by high-profile complaints from bodies

such as the Wandsworth Council for Community Relations. There were genuine fears that if it could be proved that *Love Thy Neighbour* was ‘offensive to coloured people... the Authority [could be] in breach of the law’ (Abel, 1975, p.2). To this end, in spring 1975, the IBA commissioned a black researcher, Ndumbu Abel to conduct twenty-one interviews with black viewers, predominantly drawn from Brixton in South London, in order to ascertain their perceptions of the programme. The resultant IBA report, ‘*Love Thy Neighbour* –What Coloured Immigrant Viewers Think’ was intended to be an internal document, although a letter in the archive indicates that the IBA’s head of educational programme services sent a copy to a member of the Race Relations Board (Tom, 1975). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some respondents did not like the programme and took clear exception to Eddie’s racist gibes. Of this group, the comments of an interviewee identified as a ‘female undergraduate’ are fairly typical: ‘I think the programme is distasteful; the jokes directed at race are distasteful – they probably reflect the real opinions of the scriptwriters’ (Abel, 1975, p.8).

However, in many respects the findings of the report are unexpected. The majority of those interviewed (some sixteen respondents) reported that ‘they enjoyed watching *Love Thy Neighbour* and took no offence from its racial motif’ (‘IBA Special report’, 1975, p.4). These interviewees seemingly regarded the programme as light-hearted comedy, although it is telling that several justified this view by commenting that they were subject to much worse racial insults in the street or workplace than could be heard in the ‘banter’ between Eddie and Bill: ‘It’s good entertainment. I don’t mind the insults – it’s all just a joke. I get called far worse things at work’ (Abel, 1975, p.8).

One respondent stated that *Love Thy Neighbour* was ‘just a programme’ and that he was far more worried by ‘worse things on television’ such as ‘swear words’ (Abel, 1975, p.7). It is interesting that in common with some white correspondents to the IBA, this interviewee clearly did not seem to regard the racist language used in *Love Thy Neighbour* as analogous to other ‘swear words’. Perhaps one can draw from this the conclusion that racist name-calling was fairly ubiquitous and to some extent a norm in 1970s London (a view that is reinforced by the playwright Jamal Ali in part 3.1). Another interviewee, described in the report as a ‘male social worker’, makes what appears an astonishing comment: ‘The insults may seem offensive on the surface but beneath you can see clearly that they’re not – they’re just jokes ... nowadays you can be called ‘nig-nog’ and no-one is offended – it’s taking the sharp edge off things’ (Abel, 1975, p.8).

Another two black viewers even went as far as to assert that *Love Thy Neighbour* ‘promoted racial harmony’ by ‘showing people how to take taunts and not feel hurt when called racial names’ and by ‘actually showing blacks and whites talking to each other if only to swap insults’ (Abel, 1975, p.5). What is remarkable is the way in which the show was able to stimulate this range of reactions.

However, whereas some of *Love Thy Neighbour*’s white audience complained to the IBA that Joan and Eddie were portrayed as scruffy and uneducated in comparison with the suave Bill and Barbie Reynolds, not one of Ndumbu Abel’s respondents commented on this aspect of the show. As the report stated: ‘Of the twenty-one interviewed not one claimed he [sic] enjoyed the programme because in it the white

man for a change was made to look stupid and primitive whereas the black was portrayed as handsome, intelligent and clean living' (Abel, 1975, p.6). If there was an intention on the part of the makers of *Love Thy Neighbour* to 'balance things out' between its black and white protagonists with the deft use of costume, *mise-en-scène* and 'knockabout humour', this seems to have gone unnoticed by Abel's sample of black interviewees. Indeed, one respondent claimed that 'nearly all the offence is directed at the black guy' ('IBA special report', 1975, p.7).

Interestingly, some interviewees who enjoyed *Love Thy Neighbour* seem to have done so by dint of an oppositional reading of the programme. These respondents placed emphasis on the 'general comedy' rather than the 'race jokes'. This group identified two key pleasures of *Love Thy Neighbour*: its use of 'black British stars', and the relationship between the two wives, Barbie and Joan which was felt to be 'cordial, almost exemplary' ('IBA special report', 1975, p.6). Perhaps mindful of this, the report's author asserted that '*Love Thy Neighbour* less the racial abuse (ie with Eddie as clown rather than racist clown) would be...popular with coloured viewers...'although he concluded that it was hard to determine 'the effect such a move would have on the white audience' (Abel, 1975, p.6).

***Love Thy Neighbour's* misrepresentation of the 1968 Race Relations Act**

In July 1975, just two months after the IBA produced its report on *Love Thy Neighbour*, an episode of the programme drew high-profile criticism in *New Society* for its cavalier misrepresentation of the Race Relations Act (1968). It is possible to see in this, and earlier examples, that *Love Thy Neighbour* accorded popular currency to the sensitive issue of the Race Relations Act. In the offending episode, the white

Eddie Booth, having been thrown out of the Caribbean Club, calls on the Race Relations Board to assist him (Bennion, 1975, p.256). The fictional Race Relations Board comes to Eddie's 'rescue' and threatens the Caribbean Club with a criminal prosecution, something that, in reality, was not possible under the auspices of the 1968 Act (Bennion, 1975, p.256). As *New Society* stated, the casual viewer could have got the impression that it was illegal for private clubs to impose a colour bar whereas in fact, a test case the year before had ruled otherwise (Bennion, 1975, p.256). What is implicit here is that the episode in question may have led viewers to doubt that there was any need for reform of the 1968 Race Relations Act. Joseph Weltman, head of programme services at the IBA was understandably concerned by this and wrote to Jeremy Isaacs, enclosing a copy of the article. Weltman asked Isaacs to comment on what he referred to as 'the subject of certain inaccuracies in *Love Thy Neighbour*' (Weltman, 1975). Isaacs responded thus: 'I believe that *Love Thy Neighbour* has done more good than harm. On the whole, I support my colleagues in their view that light entertainment programmes need not pay over scrupulous attention to the way things really are in portraying the world' (Isaacs, 1975). This insouciant reply infuriated Weltman. But Isaacs' response says much about the way in which those involved in broadcasting of *Love Thy Neighbour* continued to position the show as a light-hearted and ultimately ephemeral text - even in the face of some public criticism to the contrary.

Conclusion

In terms of applied methodology, this case study demonstrates the way in which the archive can be used to disclose unexpected contemporaneous audience and institutional responses to a programme which, to our modern eyes, makes for

unsettling viewing. As such, whilst it may have been mooted at an institutional level that *Love Thy Neighbour* was popular ‘light entertainment’ aimed at neutralising the thorny issue of race relations, the archive suggests a more complex landscape. Brett Mills has argued that, ‘sitcom [has] a much more significant social role than it is commonly afforded’ and this is perhaps borne out in this case-study (Mills, 2005, p. 102). Whilst the IBA archives contain letters and a report concerning *Love Thy Neighbour* which are necessarily limited in sample size, the documents nevertheless provide a fascinating snapshot of public, private and institutional dialogue surrounding race in the early 1970s.

It is clear from the letters and the IBA report that some audience members made polysemic readings of *Love Thy Neighbour* which were seemingly divorced from the positions taken by the IBA and a series’ writer. In some correspondence, race is an absent presence, as was the case with those white viewers who complained about ‘bad language’ but never mentioned the use of racist terms; something that perhaps became even more telling when some black audience members did the same. However, most letters explicitly reveal a deep unease about race and the way in which it was represented on the television. For some white viewers there seemed to be an underlying fear that race relations policy would bring about reverse discrimination and they chose to fixate on the attractive and suave Bill and Barbie Reynolds as the embodiment of such anxiety. Others are concerned about the racist language used in the programme and the impact that this will have on younger viewers; some black correspondents write harrowing accounts of their children being racially taunted in the playground, while some white viewers worry that *their* children will use racist language against their black counterparts. Some Muslim

audience members are concerned that the programme's misrepresentation of them would serve to exacerbate already strained race relations with the broader community. One group of viewers made an oppositional reading of *Love Thy Neighbour* which placed its black stars at the fore.

This case study discloses contentious and unexpected contemporaneous debates about race and the representation of race in the 1970s and, in so doing, underlines the importance of historical contextualisation in arriving at an understanding of the complex cultural functions of a popular text. What the audience letters and the IBA report on the programme overwhelmingly reveal are the ways in which different viewers used *Love Thy Neighbour* to negotiate and contest issues of race during a discordant period in British race relations. Certainly, the ambivalent nature of *Love Thy Neighbour* afforded it the ability to sustain different interpretations.

Despite the fact that *Love Thy Neighbour* habitually used offensive racist language, and generally played racism 'for laughs', there is ample contemporaneous evidence to suggest that those involved in making the programme saw the sitcom as beneficial to race relations. Vince Powell, one of the series' creators was quoted in 1975 as saying that a key motivation behind writing *Love Thy Neighbour* was to 'harmless[ly] ... take the tension out of race and colour' ('IBA Special Report', 1975, p.1). Moreover, the actor, Rudolph Walker, who played Bill Reynolds, asserted that far from being 'an Uncle Tom', his character was actually 'a hero' who could serve as a positive role model for black people:

for the first time on British television suddenly there was ... [a black person] who said 'Man, if you hit me I'm going to hit you back!' ... Up until [*Love Thy Neighbour*] all they ever saw was what we call stereotypes of black people – the black person being downtrodden, the

black person carrying the spear. And now we had [Bill Reynolds] standing up for himself, and that had to be good for the youngsters (taken from Pines, 1992, p.78).

Rudolph Walker's assertions, allied with the posited intentions of the series' creators, and the identification of *Love Thy Neighbour's* 'black stars' by some black audience members, can be examined in the light of 'black creative agency'. In a sense, *Love Thy Neighbour* is an example (albeit a problematic one), of a collaboration between white practitioners and black creative agents. It is clear from Walker's comments that he was proud of his role in the show – perhaps, as was the case with cast of *The Fosters*, his performance (and that of Nina Baden-Semper) was able, to some extent, to transcend the limitations of the script? Certainly, *Love Thy Neighbour* provides an interesting example of the way in which contested notions of the politics of 'race' gained a wide audience through sitcom. Indeed, when popular residual forms such as sitcom become concerned with 'race politics', it is indicative of deeper cultural concerns; it is important within cultural history that we examine such texts. I am certainly not suggesting here that *Love Thy Neighbour* is a progressive text; nevertheless, it is possible to argue that certain aspects of black creative agency (such as performance style) can be considered even within a deeply contested text.

2.4 – Case Study 2: *Babylon* (Franco Rosso, 1980, UK)

Introduction

This case study draws predominantly on Gavrik Losey's papers pertaining to *Babylon* from the Bill Douglas Archive at the University of Exeter in order to explore his pivotal role in the film's production history. In the final section, I utilise the interview testimony of Stacy, who watched *Babylon* in Brixton on its original release. Whilst necessarily subjective, Stacy's testimony provides an interesting discussion about the nature of the perceived 'black authenticity' of a white-authored film. Ultimately, then, this case study models two things. Firstly, the archival papers demonstrate the role of the creative producer in meeting the challenges of bringing an independent, black film to the screen in the late 1970s. Secondly, the interview testimony gives some insight into *Babylon's* reception within black communities. Given the contested nature of the film, this dual methodological approach may prove illuminating.

Filmed on location in South London in 1979, *Babylon* tells the story of a young black man, Blue (Brinsley Forde) and his group of friends. The film focuses on the lives of the young men and vividly exposes the racism to which they are subjected on a daily basis from hostile members of the community, the National Front and the police. *Babylon* was made against a backdrop of rising racial tension in Britain and as such, was politically sensitive. Producer Gavrik Losey was forced to balance the commercial requirements of *Babylon* (such as the promotion of its reggae soundtrack) with the edicts the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) and the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC). Both agencies were becoming increasingly concerned about the contentious content of the film during its making.

Losey's papers reveal his deft handling of the project, representing it variously as a 'youth film' or a 'black street movie', in dealing with censors and sponsors alike. Andrew Spicer notes that the role of the film producer has largely been neglected in academic literature (2004, p.33). He suggests two key reasons for this. Firstly, the producer is associated with the commercial, pecuniary aspect of film-making, rather than with its creative authorship, which may lead him to be regarded as a somewhat shady figure, one who is perhaps devoid of 'cultural capital' (Spicer, 2004, p.33). Secondly, there is confusion about what a film producer actually does in contrast to the more defined role of the television producer (see part 2.5). Spicer argues that when a film producer is written about, he is often disparagingly characterised as an amateur 'trimmer, pursuing not an artistic vision, but a saleable product' (2004, p.33). However, as Spicer asserts, such views are simplistic; in reality a producer must not only negotiate the hinterland 'between commerce and creativity' but also retain 'an overview of the whole film-making process' (2004, p.33).

Losey was well-placed to undertake this complex role. The son of director Joseph Losey, he had a thorough film apprenticeship, having worked as assistant film editor to several directors including Lindsay Anderson and as a cameraman for Granada Television (Berry, 2005). Furthermore, his experience of working with David Puttman and Sandy Lieberson as associate producer on projects such as *That'll be the Day* (Whatham, 1973) and *Stardust* (Apted, 1974) had given him a good insight into the flexible, creative approach to film-production necessary for survival in times of economic difficulty. This experience proved invaluable when it came to producing *Babylon*. The skills and tenacity required of Losey to raise capital, make, and sell *Babylon* were considerable. This was not least due to the nature of the

film's content. A film in which a key character answers a resounding "YES!" to the question 'do you want a race war?' would necessarily be controversial.

In part 2.2, I suggested the ways in which many film and television texts concerned with black Britain in the 1970s are highly complicated in terms of creative agency; *Babylon's* production history provides a rich example of this. The screenplay was written by two white men, Franco Rosso (who also directed the film) and Martin Stellman. Losey, and the majority of his film crew, were also white (Craven, 1980, pp.40-41). However, as Paul Newland writes: 'the filmmakers clearly felt that they shared the views of the immigrant in the city' (Newland, 2010, p.97). Indeed, as Rosso acknowledged in a contemporaneous interview, his Italian immigrant background gave him an insight into the 'pressures' experienced by his characters in *Babylon*:

A lot of the film is close to autobiographical...there's a very natural sympathy, because a lot of my experiences are very similar, even though they may not be the same – visually *I'm* not that different from English people for example...So I suppose that must have been one of the reasons why sub-consciously I wanted to do the film... (Rosso taken from Salewicz, n.d.).

Moreover, by the time that he directed *Babylon*, Rosso was highly politically engaged with London's black communities, having spent a decade working on black films and documentaries. The personnel that Rosso was involved with in the 1970s reinforce the observation (made throughout this thesis) that the agency and influence of black interventions was dependent upon informal networks of practitioners across black film, television and theatre. Rosso had worked as an editor with Horace Ové on his documentary *Reggae* and, perhaps most importantly, he made the 1979 BBC documentary, *Dread, Beat an Blood*. This profiled the Jamaican dub-poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, who had become famous amongst London's black community for

his radical political poetry expressing the ‘pressures’ faced by black British youth. Some of the scenes in *Babylon* echo those in *Dread, Beat an Blood*, such as that when the film’s main protagonists drive through Deptford, in an open-backed lorry, clutching their sound equipment. *Dread, Beat an Blood* was due to be aired in 1979 but it was controversially re-scheduled by the BBC who deemed it to be too politically sensitive to be shown prior to a General Election (Salewicz, n.d.). So Rosso was a central figure in the struggle for black articulation through film and television in the 1970s.

***Babylon* and 1970s race relations**

At the end of a turbulent decade, race relations were approaching their nadir; this is a theme which underpins *Babylon*’s narrative. In part 2.1, I highlighted the problematic relationship between the police and black communities which had existed throughout the 1970s. In London, the Special Patrol Group (SPG), predominantly stopped and searched (and sometimes physically assaulted) large numbers of the black population, especially young men (IRR, 1979, p.10). Indeed, by 1977, the authors of the Commission for Racial Equality’s annual report were moved to comment that they were: ‘...concerned with the disproportionate number of black youths...arrested in suspicion, the now well known ‘sus’ charge...’ (CRE, 1977, p.33). The SPG was also used to police increasingly frequent demonstrations by members of the disenfranchised black community (Fryer, 1987, p.397). A few months before the filming of *Babylon* commenced, some 2,756 officers, including the SPG, forcibly broke up a crowd of people who had gathered to demonstrate against a National Front campaign meeting in Southall - an area which housed a high proportion of black and Asian people (Fryer, 1987, p.397). Eye witnesses later

described the way in which the police had set their dogs on the demonstrators, had driven their vans into sections of the crowd and had indiscriminately ‘bludgeoned people at random as they scattered and ran’ (Fryer, 1987, p.397). Just days later, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner is reported to have told London’s black community ‘if you keep off the streets...and behave yourselves you won’t have the SPG to worry about’ (taken from Fryer, 1987, p.397).

Babylon deals explicitly with police brutality. In a shocking scene, two men in an unmarked police car chase Blue (who has merely been taking a late night walk) through the Deptford streets. When they catch up with him, one man violently assaults him and spits out racist abuse: ‘You’re a dirty little slag like the rest of your black mob’. Meanwhile, his colleague coolly radios the police station to report on the ‘suspect’ that they have arrested. Finally, Blue is forced into the car, his face bruised and swollen. In interview with Chris Salewicz, Franco Rosso revealed that he had used a ‘former London policeman’ to work as an ‘advisor on *Babylon*’:

[the policeman] told us ... that that sort of situation [the pursuit of Blue] gets really exciting for a copper: His adrenalin really gets going. In fact, if that happens it’s almost better to take what’s coming to you. Because once you run, those guys *really* get into it [emphasis in original] (Rosso, taken from Salewicz, n.d.).

In part 2.1, I argued that as the 1970s progressed, there was little practical support from either of the major political parties for black people living in Britain (Sivanandan, 1987, p.132). The Labour Government had implemented a new Race Relations Act in 1976, which looked at both direct and indirect racial discrimination and extended to areas such as ‘employment, housing [and] the provision to the public of goods, facilities and services’ (Runnymede Trust, 1980, p.44). However, the terms of the Act did not cover the police and other public authorities such as the

National Health Service (Runnymede Trust, 1980, p.44). Such legislation inadvertently enabled police brutality and corrupt behaviour to go unchallenged in the courts. Added to this was the constant push for the stemming of (black) immigration as advocated by both Labour and the Conservatives throughout the course of the decade (Sivanandan, 1987, p.132). As Sivanandan, writing in the radical journal *Race and Class*, noted: ‘both [parties] hold the view that to improve race relations, to make things better for the ‘coloureds’ you must first restrict their numbers’ (Sivanandan, 1987, p.132). These sentiments were voiced by Margaret Thatcher in January 1978. In a television interview for Granada’s *World in Action* to promote her election campaign, she commented:

A committee which looked at...[immigration] said that if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be 4 million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might rather be *swamped* by people with a different culture [my emphasis] (1978, January 27, Granada).

Babylon is engaged with the way in which such discourses affect second generation black youths such as Blue and his friends. As Beefy (Trevor Laird), snarls at the white woman who confronts him at the lock-up and tells him to ‘go back home’: ‘This *is* my fucking country, lady’.

Financing *Babylon*

Even in the context of a cash-strapped 1970s British film industry, *Babylon* was a low-budget film. The entire film cost £360 000 (roughly the same amount as a contemporaneous Denis Potter television film) and some 87% of the budget was provided by the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) (Craven, 1980, p.40: Newland, 2010, p.98). Mamoun Hassan (former Head of Production at the BFI) had taken over as managing director of the NFFC in the spring of 1979 and had initially

found it hard to persuade his board to help to finance *Babylon*. He later recalled that several members had asked, ‘who wants to see films about black people?’ (Hassan, n.d). Although the NFFC eventually agreed to provide money for *Babylon*, the board remained cautious. In a letter written a month before filming commenced, Hassan confided to Rosso and Stellman that, having read the script, the board of the NFFC had misgivings about the project:

[the NFFC]... is worried that the film will be incomprehensible because of the use of patois or ethnic slang. Authenticity is an essential element in the film...but if we do not understand what people are saying then we are going to be irritated and alienated... (Hassan, 1979).

It seems doubtful that the issue at stake was the ‘incomprehensible’ nature of the dialogue alone. Rather, Jamaican patois had become widely appropriated by second-generation black youths as a recognised signifier of resistance and black power. This was especially the case among those who identified with the Rastafarian movement (Cashmore, 1979, pp.167-168). In the final cut of *Babylon* the authentic patois remained, although Losey was forced to have the film subtitled. This concession infuriated Eden Charles of the radical magazine *Race Today*, who commented that subtitles lent the film ‘a ridiculous, almost Monty Python’ element (1981, p.90).

Filming *Babylon*

Filming took place over a six-week period in November and December 1979 (Craven, 1980, p.40). *Babylon* was filmed on location in Deptford and the West End. The filmmakers used the ‘second floor of the Methodist Mission in Deptford High Street’ as their ‘production base’ (Losey, taken from Newland, 2009, p.310). This had the advantage of being inexpensive, but also perhaps enabled the team to gain the trust of a marginalised community. Gavrik Losey, in interview with Paul Newland, summed up the impoverished nature of Deptford as he witnessed it in the

winter of 1979: ‘We were ... Shooting [*Babylon*] in the real community – that real community live[d] in that condition. Deptford [was] a deprived area – it certainly was then’ (Losey in Newland, 2009, p.310). Location Manager Patrick Cassavetti’s memos and letters reveal that filming was undertaken in local places such as Deptford Green School, Davenport Road Garage and The Silwood Estate.

Significantly, archival material also reveals that the decision was taken to close the Deptford film set to all but crew and actors ‘because of the film’s sensitive subject matter’ and the fact that filming itself ‘was taking place in an area of London’ known for its ‘racial tension’ (Osiris Films Presents *Babylon*, 1980, p.4).

The Losey papers reveal that controversy surrounded the use of black ‘extras’ in the film. Franco Rosso, Martin Stellman and the film’s casting director, Sheila Trezise, had contacts in South London’s black community and seemingly used a snowballing technique to recruit scores of extras, ‘the vast majority’ of whom were ‘West Indians living around the Deptford, Lewisham, Peckham and Croydon area’ (Osiris Films Presents *Babylon*, 1980, p.4). A memo from Stellman to Rosso, written during filming in December 1979, demonstrates the way in which both men relied on informal networks to ensure that they would have fifty black ‘extras’ for the scene in the film concerning Lover’s engagement party: ‘3 Notting Hill mums and 6 kids c/o Brinsley Forde ... Asward (5+3 women) c/o Mikey ... Archie Pool will bring two women [,] Brian Bovell will bring 3 people of unknown sex’ (Stellman, 1979). All of the personnel listed here are either actors in the film (such as Brinsley Forde and Archie Pool) or musicians involved in the film’s soundtrack. Stellman goes on to list other people who are friends and relatives of other practitioners involved in the film who have agreed to bring ‘extras’ along with them for the shoot. Further

archival material indicates that this approach to recruiting extras was deeply frowned upon by the Extra's Union, who threatened action on the grounds that only their members should be used for filming (Osiris Films Presents *Babylon*, 1980, p.4). It was only after being shown the script that the Union realised that they did not have sufficient numbers of black paid-up members to take part in *Babylon*'s large set pieces such as the 'Blues dance' for example. This admission is, perhaps, indicative of the marginalised nature of black British film in the 1970s, and the necessity of artists to rely upon informal networks rather than union labour.

Promoting *Babylon*

Perhaps Losey's struggles with the NFFC and the difficulties of filming in Deptford suggested to him that he should proceed with caution when promoting the completed film. Certainly in contemporaneous interviews, he began to play down the racial element of *Babylon*. In an article for *Films and Filming* in May 1980, Losey told the interviewer, Jenny Craven, that *Babylon* was a 'youth movie' and went on to suggest that whilst it contained a black cast, this did not 'separate it from other stories about poor kids pouring their hearts and souls into making music as a way out of the slums...the colour is different; the dreams are just the same' (Craven, 1980, p.40). It could be argued that by describing the film this way, Losey was attempting to align *Babylon* with the more politically anodyne youth films on which he had previously worked. *Time Out* carried a two-page feature about *Babylon* in November 1980. The journalist Vivien Goldman spoke to members of the cast, and to Franco Rosso and Gavrik Losey. Whilst Rosso and cast members such as Beverley Michaels were keen to promote the authenticity of the film's depiction of the privations faced by black people, Losey himself made the following comments about *Babylon*:

It's about blacks, but it's not a black movie. I didn't want a polemic movie, I wanted a movie that people could sympathise with and understand. It's a look at the potential situation arising out of the treatment of a minority – it could be Swedes or Italians. It's a peace and love movie, really...(Losey taken from Goldman, 1980, p.13).

However, Losey's papers indicate that in contrast with his public positioning of the film, in private he held another view. In short, Losey was not always so cautious about the way that he 'sold' *Babylon* to others. In terms of the music used in the film, Losey recognised that black 'authenticity' was of paramount importance both to the film's financial backers and to a burgeoning youth market. The Losey papers reveal that £30 000 of *Babylon's* budget had come from the music company Chrysalis, who were keen to replicate the success of other record labels in exploiting soundtracks from youth-oriented films (Osiris Films Presents *Babylon*, 1980, p.4). Furthermore, dub reggae, the music genre used throughout *Babylon*, was enjoying high levels of popularity among black *and* white youths in Britain (Newland, 2013, p. 124). This was partly due to the fact that the punk movement of a few years earlier had provided some white youths with widespread exposure to dub reggae. In correspondence with those in the music industry, Losey was mindful of the commercial importance of *Babylon's* soundtrack; he showed none of his previous reticence about the film's racial content, but instead was keen to emphasise its 'edgy' nature. In a private letter to Don Smith of the Musicians Union, Losey described *Babylon* as 'a black British street movie made on a shoestring' (Losey, 14 March, 1980). In this way, Losey demonstrated a high level of awareness of the emergence of niche taste communities, in which 'authentic' music played a highly important role.

***Babylon* and the BBFC**

Given that a proposed *Play For Today* version of *Babylon* had been abandoned by the BBC five years earlier due to its inflammatory content, and in the light of concerns expressed by the NFFC, Gavrik Losey appears to have been worried about how the film would be received by the censors (Goldman, 1980, p.12). Losey's private correspondence illustrates that, once again, he argued that *Babylon's* primary focus was youth in general, rather than black youth in particular. Moreover, he was keen for the film to receive an 'AA' certificate which would make it available to the lucrative 'younger teenager' market. In June 1980, Losey wrote a circumspect letter to James Ferman, the Secretary of the BBFC:

This is the first submission that I have made to you as a Producer for my own company. I thought that it might be helpful to you in considering our picture to know that we regard it as being concerned with the general problem of youth today although it is ethnically orientated around British West Indians in South London (Losey, 1980 June 11).

Whilst Losey was able to exploit his considerable commercial acumen when dealing with the music industry or journalists, he was evidently less successful with the BBFC. Despite his letter to Ferman, the Board took a hard line with *Babylon* when it came to classification and awarded it an 'X' certificate. They were clearly worried about the politically contentious nature of the film. In an unprecedented move, they invited seven members of the Commission for Racial Equality to view and discuss *Babylon* with the Board (Ferman, 2 October, 1980). Ferman later recounted the discussion to Losey in a private correspondence (located in Losey's papers):

[the Commission for Racial Equality] thought that the film, although truthful, was potentially inflammatory in its reinforcement of racial stereotypes, and they ended up voting five to two to recommend the 'X'. This very much reflected the...opinion...of the British Board of Film Censors (Ferman, 1980).

It is instructive to note that in terms of visual content, the scene which drew the most concern from the BBFC, in which Blue stabs his racist neighbour, is fairly muted. The scene does not happen in close-up, the viewer does not see the knife enter the body and no blood is shown; the camera does not linger on the injured man. Visually then, *Babylon* is much less explicitly visceral than other contemporaneous films that were given an 'X' certificate such as *Scum* (Clarke, 1979). Indeed, it would seem that *Babylon*'s 'X' certificate had much more to do with the difficult socio-political climate against which it was made and released rather than its explicit content. This view is reinforced in Ferman's letter to Losey justifying the certification: 'Young teenagers would be ... attracted by the music and perhaps confused and troubled by the message' (Ferman, 1980). So incitement to racial violence seems to have been at the centre of the Board's concerns. Brinsley Forde's disappointment at the BBFC's decision is revealed in an article by Chris Salewicz. Here the fear of a violent backlash is advanced as precisely the reason for censorial leniency:

Three black children of ... school age, are trying to attract his [Brinsley Forde's] attention: they want to know when *Babylon* will open and whether they may go and see it. Reluctantly, Brinsley has to point out to them that it is a 'X'. 'See', he says ... 'they're exactly the age-group who should see the film – to make sure they don't end up stabbing people when the pressure gets too much (Salewicz, n.d.).

For Forde the 'X' certificate was problematic because it meant that *Babylon*'s potential to educate and inform was denied to the very demographic who most needed it.

In short, the Losey papers illuminate the extent of a producer's struggles with a number of enablers and gatekeepers at all stages of the production process. The archive shows the ways in which Losey juggled the demands of the NFFC, the

BBFC and the music industry. In so doing, he managed to secure financial backing from paymasters with very different agendas, by presenting the project in different ways, and agreeing to compromises. Ultimately, his failure to convince the censors of the film's suitability for the music industry's target demographic reveals much about contemporary establishment sensitivities to race politics.

Reception

Babylon was previewed at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1980 where it was favourably received (Newland, 2010, p.99). The film had its general release in the UK on November 6 1980 (ACE advert, 1980 November 7, p.16). The critical response was generally positive. Gavin Millar, writing in *The Listener*, praised *Babylon's* 'convincing scenes' especially those which dealt explicitly with police brutality (1980, p.7). *Monthly Film Bulletin's* Steve Jenkins enjoyed 'Dennis Bovell's superb pulsing score' but was concerned that *Babylon* lacked the ability to 'present its characters as other than likeable rogues, villains or victims' (1980, p.209).

Significantly, *Race Today* sent their film critic, Eden Charles to Brixton's ACE cinema to watch the film. (In part 3.4, I discuss the independent ACE cinema's targeting of black audiences). Adverts placed by the ACE in the *South London Press* newspaper, reveal that *Babylon* played for four weeks, with two Sunday showings and up to three showings on each week day. Unusually, the commercially savvy ACE did not present *Babylon* as a double-bill with a 'tried and tested favourite' such as *The Harder They Come* (Henzell, 1972). They rightly felt confident from the outset that the film would 'stand alone' for their niche audience. The wording of the

adverts suggest that it was *Babylon's* popularity with Brixton audiences that prompted the ACE to hold the film over, rather than a pre-arranged distribution run. On November 14 1980, the ACE took out a box advert in the *South London Press* stating that *Babylon* was being 'retained for a 3rd great week'. A week later, another advert indicated that the film was being 'held over for the 4th week by public demand' (ACE advert, 1980, November 21, p.16).

Although *Race Today's* Eden Charles had some reservations about *Babylon*, his review gives some indication of the film's resonance for a particular audience:

I saw the film on a Saturday night in Brixton. The audience largely comprised the living models from which the celluloid characters were cast. They had come to see themselves and they were not disappointed as a certain walk, a facial expression...generated cheers of recognition and appreciation. The audience roared their approval at the drop of a 'raasclatt' [Jamaican expletive]. Throughout, there was a virtual love affair between the audience and the film characters (Charles, 1981, p.90).

Obviously, this one example cannot be used to generalise about audience response to *Babylon*. However, the example is useful insofar as it gives an indication of the film being a fairly accurate representation of life for young black Londoners in the late 1970s, as evidenced by the 'cheers of recognition and appreciation' of the audience.

A further interesting insight into audience response to the film is given by Stacy, whom I interviewed in Brixton in 2010 (his recollections of watching *Black Joy* are documented in part 3.4). Stacy was a student when *Babylon* was released and went to see the film with a group of male peers. Paul Newland has argued that *Time Out's* generous coverage of *Babylon* in November 1980 'helped initial box office figures' (2010, pp. 100-101). Indeed, in interview, Stacy stated that it was the article in *Time Out* that influenced him and his group of friends to go and see *Babylon*:

So [there's] word of mouth, this film's coming out and *Time Out* covered it. *Time Out* was very different in those days. [It covered] ... alternative media (because *Babylon* in a way was an alternative film) ... So they had a whole three or four page interview with Rossi the director, before it came out ... Let's be blunt here, you are in your little scene, you wanted to be covered only by the intelligent media (Stacy, personal communication, August 22, 2010).

Like Eden Charles, Stacy and his friends went to see the film at Brixton's ACE cinema (Stacy, 2010). His recollections were overwhelmingly positive. He particularly liked Blue, who seemed to him to be a well-rounded and 'authentic' character:

[*Babylon*] ... was a hundred percent right, especially for me because the guy [Blue] isn't too, he isn't too wild and raw and looking for fights all the time. He's sort of more the progressive Rasta movement. Yeah, a kind of victim of circumstances (Stacy, 2010).

Stacy went on to explain that the 'sus' scenes in the film had particular resonance for him, not least because his brother (who was a clergyman in Brixton during the late 1970s) was arrested by the police and held in a cell, seemingly because he was walking alone at night (Stacy, 2010). As Stacy ruefully commented, wearing a dog collar was not enough to prevent police harassment during this period – any black person could feel the 'pressure' and find themselves, like Blue, 'a victim of circumstances' (Stacy, 2010).

For Stacy and his friends, *Babylon's* reggae music score served as both a source of pleasure and to further underline the political motivations of the film:

The film music, you know the music is very tight. The music scene on *Babylon* ... it was Aswad, Shaka (the sound system guy) ... And yes, there's the script backing those tunes as well. That was a big point [in *Babylon*]. Really. The music ... reggae was serious, dry and beat ... (Stacy, 2010).

As Stacy asserted, reggae was integral to what he termed as 'black urban identity' and this was the first time he and his friends had seen its 'raw' British/Jamaican

fusion accurately depicted on the screen (Stacy, 2010). As he explained, black politics were inextricably bound with reggae and it was therefore a major locus of his personal identification with the film: 'it's not *just* 'the music' because music is your whole life' (Stacy, 2010). In an echo of Brinsley Forde's comment that '*Babylon* is as accurate as you can go in a film', Stacy was at pains to highlight the film's 'black authenticity' (Forde taken from Salewicz, n.d: Stacy, 2010). Although it had been over thirty years since he watched *Babylon*, Stacy had vivid memories of the 'emotional kick' that he felt as he left the ACE:

Coming out of *Babylon* we came out, yeah man, inspired. And there wasn't too many jokes pulled because I guess we were really feeling it ... And if you are like fully connected with a film, sometimes you don't say anything, because then it's like you are really feeling it (Stacy, 2010).

Although one audience interviewee cannot be seen to be representative of a whole community, the significance of Stacy's interview testimony lies in its richness as a source. Stacy's comments about the emotional resonance of *Babylon*, the film's integrity, and its implied 'authenticity' as a black text are deeply telling. Moreover, Stacy's comments, when taken with Eden Charles' review in *Race Today*, become even more compelling. Whilst these sources cannot be interpreted as conclusive evidence of the film's popularity for black audiences in London, they do nevertheless constitute a powerful picture to this effect.

Conclusion

Archival evidence reveals that in the case of Gavrik Losey and *Babylon*, the role of the producer extended far beyond the 'shadowy realm of business interests' (Spicer, 2004, p.33). Losey's role in *Babylon* can be regarded as that of a mediator and broker whose vision influenced and shaped the completed film. In this way, Losey

used skills honed on previous productions to help position the film as a ‘youth movie’ in a politically complex market, and also to negotiate finance from the recording company Chrysalis on the back of the commercial viability of the film’s soundtrack. He also took steps to defend and protect *Babylon*’s creative integrity in the face of institutional sensitivity and suspicion. The film stands as a tribute to the dedication of the collaborators (black and white) whom Losey brought together. This, and the film’s popularity with black audiences is underlined by new interview testimony. Stacy’s recollections reveal much about the complex notion of perceptions of black authorship and authenticity. Although Stacy was wholly aware that *Babylon*’s script was written by two white men, he chose not to emphasise this. Instead, he positioned the film firmly as ‘a black movie’ – one which sympathetically and authentically echoed his own lived experience. This positive response to *Babylon* can be compared interestingly with the reception of *Black Joy* (in part 3.4).

2.5 – Case Study 3: *A Hole in Babylon* (Ové, 1979, BBC).

Introduction

This case study draws predominantly on original interviews with the writer/director, Horace Ové and the producer, Graham Benson in order to explore the production history of the 1979 BBC ‘Play for Today’ *A Hole in Babylon*. This example has been selected for close attention because it reveals the extent of the coup that it was possible for a respected black filmmaker like Ové to achieve at the BBC by the late 1970s, albeit in a drama strand that was renowned for its risk-taking.

Whereas my previous two case studies drew heavily on archival evidence, documentation concerning *A Hole in Babylon* is largely missing from the BBC Written Archives. It seems highly likely that *A Hole in Babylon* would have generated correspondence from BBC viewers on the basis of its controversial subject matter, and because during this period the ‘Play for Today’ strand attracted audiences of between 5 and 10 million (Cooke, 2003, p.92). Nonetheless, unlike the case of *Love Thy Neighbour*, no viewers’ letters about this programme have survived. Similarly, where I was able to draw on a wealth of archival material in exploring the production history of *Babylon*, this approach is not possible for *A Hole in Babylon*.

The ‘Play for Today’ producer, Irene Shubik wrote presciently in 1975 that the BBC’s then-habitual ‘dumping’ of what they regarded as ‘ephemeral’ written files about television programmes (or, as in some cases, the wiping of tapes or the ‘junking’ of filmed footage) would prove a major stumbling block to the researcher of the future (1975: 2000, pp.163-164): ‘There is no guarantee that a student in 100

years' time, hoping to make a study of English television productions in the 1970s will have sufficient material available to do so; most of these 'chronicles of our time' will have vanished into the ether, condemned, by the sheer weight of their numbers to oblivion' (Shubik, 1975: 2000, p.164). Creativity on the part of the researcher is required, then, where there is scant archival evidence available. Here, I draw upon original interviews which reveal much about agency within the industrial context of the BBC. Interestingly, my meeting with Graham Benson yielded some important archival material about the programme; he had kept a book of press cuttings during his early career as a producer with the BBC and was generous enough to lend it to me. Therefore the majority of the material evidence referred to in this case study are from Graham Benson's personal papers.

***A Hole in Babylon* –background to the production**

A Hole in Babylon intersperses archival news footage with fictional film in order to sympathetically portray, through a series of flashbacks, the imagined 'back stories' of three young black men who held up a Knightsbridge restaurant in 1975. *A Hole in Babylon* makes the argument that the underlying motivation for their crime was ideological. Ové's film links the case convincingly to the overarching structural problems faced by 'second-generation' West Indian youths in 1970s Britain. As Sivanandan has argued, this was a time when racism was built into the very structures of key British institutions such as the police, the judiciary and the educational system (1987, pp.30-33).

A Hole in Babylon is a fictional play, but it is based on actual events that took place on the night of September 28 1975 when three young black men, Franklin Davies,

Wesley Dick and Anthony ‘Bonsu’ Monroe, attempted to steal the weekly takings of the Spaghetti House restaurant, in London’s Knightsbridge. As Davies, Dick and Monroe held up staff at gunpoint, one managed to escape and to alert the police (Metropolitan Police Service, na., nd.). What had begun as an attempted robbery, subsequently escalated into a siege, replete with nine Italian hostages who were held in a cramped 12ft by 10ft cellar (Phillips, 1979, p.7). For six days, the men refused to give themselves up to the ‘four hundred police officers who were deployed at the scene’ (Bourne, 2011, p.2). From the outset, Davies, Dick and Monroe claimed that their actions had been politically motivated. Finding themselves without recourse to state funding for a black supplementary school and other black community projects, and feeling increasingly marginalised from what they regarded as ‘white society’, the men decided that robbery was both a means of securing the money that they needed for their ‘cause’ *and* a form of black protest (Sivanandan, 1987, p.38). As the siege dragged on, Davies, Dick and Monroe began to make increasingly desperate and unrealistic demands under the aegis of the Black Liberation Front (who would later go on to distance themselves from the activities of the three men) (Bourne, 2011, p.4).

The bungled robbery, subsequent five-day siege, and the hostage-takers’ outlandish request that a plane should be chartered to fly them to the West Indies, ‘made front-page headlines’ in the British press and was widely covered on television news (Nazareth, 1979, p.26). As Nazareth has pointed out, the mainstream press generally positioned the protagonists of what it had dubbed ‘the Spaghetti House siege’, as ‘bungling amateurs’ or ‘black criminal gangsters’ (1979, p.26). Evidently, in their briefings to journalists ‘the police deliberately played down the political overtones’

of the case and this seems to have had an impact on the event's reportage (Nazareth, 1979, p.26). Indeed, Nazareth has argued that much contemporaneous press coverage completely glossed over the underlying political motivation for the robbery (1979, p.26). According to Nazareth, when politics *were* cited as a contributing factor in the case, newspapers tended to reassure their readers that Davies, Dick and Monroe were, in fact, simply using black radicalism as an excuse for what was plainly a criminal act (1979, p.26). Even *The Guardian*, whilst generally sympathetic to 'black issues', seemed doubtful as how to politically situate the actions of the three men. Were, Davies, Dick and Monroe, it wondered, mere criminals? At best, *The Guardian* worried that the three's 'misguided' political actions, 'could, if the gunmen are turned into black folk heroes, worsen black-white and black/police relations' (cited in 'Gunning', 1975, p.219).

The Spaghetti House siege seemingly divided black communities. Letters written to the radical black magazine *Race Today*, reveal confusion and anger about what had recently taken place in Knightsbridge. As one correspondent, Veronica Baptiste, wrote to *Race Today* in October 1975:

I wonder if you can help me by shedding some light on the Spaghetti Siege. Was it political or wasn't it? I, like many of my friends, identified and sympathised with the three in the basement. From the outset, the police maintained that it was criminal. The black organisations involved didn't seem to be sure ... I really don't know what to think and I feel quite demoralised because black organisations don't seem to know what they are doing (Baptiste, 1975, p.218).

Another letter-writer, Jack Hines, was deeply angered that Davies, Dick and Monroe had appointed themselves 'black leaders' (Hines, 1975, p.259). Hines complained that the criminal actions of the men played up to broader stereotypes of black people as 'lawless'; in short, he concluded that they, '... cannot purport to speak for us.

They lead and represent no black people but themselves' (Hines, 1975, p.259).

However, in its editorial for October 1975, *Race Today*, whilst condemning the kidnapping of innocent men, linked the case to the overarching structural problems faced by 'second-generation' 'West-Indian' youths ('Gunning', 1975, p.219).

Racism, it argued, was built into the very structures of key institutions and was manifest in the disproportionate levels of unemployment among young blacks, police brutality and miscarriages of justice, poor housing conditions and the widespread practice of 'bussing' of black children to poorly-performing inner-city schools ('Gunning', 1975, p.219). *Race Today* concluded that a whole generation of politically-radicalised young black people were 'fight[ing] an unending war against a society to which they [were violently]... opposed ...' ('Gunning', 1975, p.219).

The conflicted and often confused discourse surrounding the Spaghetti House siege fascinated the Trinidadian film director, Horace Ové (who had previously co-written and directed the 1975 feature film *Pressure*). As Ové revealed in interview, he had 'begun researching the siege only a matter of months after it had ended' and was minded to make a film about it (Phillips, 1979b, p.7): '[I wanted] to find out ... what made these men commit this act ... I discovered that one of the men was a medical student, another was a writer ... so I started thinking, they're not hooligans' (taken from Pines, 1992, p.126). Ové corresponded with Dick, Davies and Monroe in prison, where all three were serving lengthy sentences (Pines, 1992, p.126). He also spent a year interviewing people who had known the men prior to the siege (Phillips, 1979, p.7). Ové drafted a screenplay in 1976 but was, at that stage, unable to find financial or institutional backing to make a film about such a controversial and politically-sensitive subject (Phillips, 1979, p.7).

Early in 1979, a breakthrough came when Ové was approached by the BBC producer, Graham Benson. Having been ‘very impressed’ with *Pressure*, when he saw it at Notting Hill Gate cinema, Benson was keen to collaborate with Ové on *Play for Today* (Graham Benson, personal communication, May 3, 2013). In interview, Graham Benson stated that he had been mindful that there was little on 1970s television that dealt sympathetically with the realities of life for Britain’s black communities or with the nuances of ‘black politics’ (Benson, 2013). Benson was therefore open to any ideas Ové might have for a *Play for Today* that would cast an original light on the socio-political situation faced by young black people (Benson, 2013). During their first meeting together, Ové suggested that they should make a film from the viewpoint of the three perpetrators involved in the Spaghetti House siege; a project that Benson was immediately drawn to (Benson, 2013). As Benson stated: ‘Like everybody else doing drama [at the BBC] at the time [I] had a liberal point of view. We were looking to establish the truth [about certain issues]’ (Benson, 2013).

From the outset, both men were keen that the film would be a ‘factual drama; a piece of *fiction* based on fact [rather than] ... a drama-documentary’ (Benson, 2013). This thinking is seemingly in line with Bignell, Lacey and Macmurrough-Kavanagh’s observation that ‘the single television play’ of the mid-1960s to the late 1970s frequently afforded playwrights the ‘licence’ to ‘say things that normally wouldn’t get said’ in documentaries (Bignell et al, 2000, p.1). It is certainly instructive to reflect that earlier in 1979, Franco Rosso’s arguably less politically-contentious documentary about the black poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Dread, Beat ‘n’ Blood*,

was postponed by the BBC until after the general election on the basis of ‘one uncomplimentary reference to [Margaret] Thatcher’ (Nazareth, 1979, p.26). For Benson, then, a fictional representation of the Spaghetti House siege would provide the necessary freedom to put across what he termed as ‘our *version* of events’ (Benson, 2013). As Benson went on to explain in interview: ‘I was very, very particular about demonstrating that it was a point of view, so that ... a panel of people couldn’t then say, you got this, this and this wrong’. It is biased, *yes*’ (Benson, 2013). Benson’s approach says much about the creative freedom that the BBC afforded drama producers at this time, as Ansorge and others have also testified. Moreover, it highlights the institutionally-endorsed view that (race) politics could be articulated more adventurously through fictional forms in this period. This is a major factor determining the focus of the thesis as a whole.

Pre-production

Although Ové already had a script for *A Hole in Babylon*, Graham Benson and his story editor, Terry Coles, were concerned that he was inexperienced as a television writer and they insisted on appointing the Hull-based writer, Jim Hawkins as co-author. Benson had previously worked with both Hawkins and Coles on the play *Thank you Comrades* (1978, BBC2) and knew that both men could work to high standards and tight deadlines (Benson, 2013). Ové would subsequently go on to state that Hawkins was parachuted in by Benson to add a white balance to the script, although this was something Benson later denied (Summers, 1979, n.p.:Benson, 2013). However, there is no evidence to suggest that Ové felt that his authorial voice was in any way compromised by working with Hawkins and, in interview, Ové was

at pains to state that the collaboration actually worked very well (Ové, 2009).

Interestingly, he compared it favourably with his co-authorship with Sam Selvon on *Pressure*: ‘Jim was into what I was doing, was interested ... and he got into it. And we were able to work [together]’ (Ové, 2009). As had been the case with *Pressure*, Ové and his co-author spent considerable time interviewing members of the black community in the Ladbroke Grove area before embarking on the script-writing. Ové claimed that this process was essential to understanding the milieu that Davies, Dick and Monroe had inhabited before they committed the robbery: ‘It was about authenticity’ (Ové, 2009: Manning, 1979, n.p.). Ové stated in a 1979 interview that he actually considered *A Hole in Babylon* to be a sequel to *Pressure*. Tony, *Pressure*’s key protagonist, could, he argued, be ‘read’ as a younger version of Wesley Dick or Bonsu Monroe (Summers, 1979, n.p.). He went on to explain that: ‘Both [Dick and Monroe] were embittered with white society ... It’s a pattern [earlier explored in *Pressure*] ... a black kid is not given a chance and ends up on the wrong streets with the wrong people. Then he fights back for his rights’ (Ové quoted in Summers, 1979, n.p.).

Along with the scriptwriting, a further issue that taxed Graham Benson was how to deal with the practicalities of filming the actual siege. *Play for Today* budgets were fairly modest and this, allied with the practice of producing twenty-one plays for a single season, meant that the shooting of individual plays generally had to be contained within a maximum of four weeks (Benson, 2013). Benson soon realised that a full ‘reconstruction of what was going on outside’ the Spaghetti House during the siege was highly impractical, both in terms of finance and logistics (Benson, 2013). Days of location-shooting in Knightsbridge with a large film crew, involving four-hundred extras dressed as policemen, and necessitating road closures, would not

only eat heavily into the budget, but would also be nigh-on impossible in terms of permissions (Benson, 2013). As Benson explained, *A Hole In Babylon* was shot at a time before ‘there were council liaison offices in London ... which had departments for giving permits to [film in the capital]’ (Benson, 2013). The BBC had a Locations Office which helped with arrangements for location shooting, but its staff were heavily reliant on the goodwill of certain police sergeants (Benson, 2013):

They [the police] were tougher then. It was [about] ... order and they ... [prevented] anything that sort of upset the efficient management of the city and the street, you were encouraged to film on Sundays for example, things like that. And so I think there probably was an element of that with this film [*A Hole in Babylon*] (Benson, 2013).

At a subsequent meeting, Ové and Benson decided that they could circumvent these constraints if archival news footage of the event could be interspersed with Ové’s material (Benson, 2013). Given that Ové was wedded to a documentary-realist mode of filmmaking and that *A Hole in Babylon* would be shot on 16mm film, both men figured that this (then-unusual) juxtaposition would not be too jarring for the viewer (Benson, 2013). In interview, Benson recalled that he used his connections within the BBC to gain access to the news footage:

Ron Neil was the head of BBC News ... I rang him up and said, ‘Ron, I want to come and talk with you ... I’m making this film about the Spaghetti House Siege’. And he was terribly interested in the whole thing ... he had been a young news producer at the time and he said, ‘Of course, there’s millions of miles of footage’ (Benson, 2013).

According to Benson, such collaborations between departments were fairly common in the BBC in the 1970s, and were actively encouraged by senior management (Benson, 2013). Benson went on to explain that what he termed as a ‘collegiate atmosphere’ permeated the corporation at this time, greatly helped by the fact that everyone was housed at Television Centre.

Horace Ové was largely responsible for the casting of *A Hole in Babylon* (Benson, 2013). Of paramount importance was the chosen actors' ability to 'inhabit' the socio-political environment of the drama as authentically as possible. As he explained in interview: 'I tried to get them into the world of reality and to be themselves, not *The Actor*' (Ové, 2009). To this end, Ové selected those black actors whom he felt to be sympathetic to the world inhabited by the protagonists of the Spaghetti House siege. As Benson recalled: 'Horace very much knew who he wanted from the black community' (Benson, 2013). Ové cast Trevor Thomas in the part of Bonsu Monroe. As Ové explained in a 1979 interview, Thomas' good looks meant that he often got walk-on parts in television series such as *The Fosters*, where he invariably played the role of the 'smooth' ladies' man (taken from Philips, 1979, p.7). However, Thomas' most prominent role to date had been Benjamin, the naïve 'country boy' in the film *Black Joy* (Simmons, 1977). Although *Black Joy* was in many ways a contentious film (as will be discussed in detail in Part 3), it seems likely that Thomas' sympathetic portrayal of the newly-arrived migrant who is corrupted by life in the hostile metropolis, may have helped to convince Ové that he had the versatility as an actor to play Bonsu Monroe, the well-educated middle-class young man whose frustration at the 'white system' drew him into radical black politics and the murky world of Franklin Davies, a petty criminal with a history of mental health problems.

The Guyanese actress Carmen Munroe played the mother of Bonsu Monroe. By the time that Carmen Munroe worked on *A Hole in Babylon*, she had a successful career, both in theatre and television. Munroe later asserted that she had always sought out 'challenging' work (taken from Pines, 1992, p.63). She recalled that in her early career, she had endured long periods of financial hardship, rather than take what she

termed as the kind of ‘role where the character was just described as exotic’ (taken from Pines, 1992, p.61). That Munroe took on the role of Bonsu’s mother in *A Hole in Babylon*, says much about her willingness to push her own boundaries as an actress. Carmen Munroe was the aunt of the *real* Bonsu Monroe and, as such, had been deeply affected by what she regarded as the essentially tragic scenario of the Spaghetti House siege (Bourne, 2011, p.2):

It was an amazing and sad story ... of a young person who had really gone and messed up his life ... [as part of] the actual boy’s family ... [I was] even more acutely aware of the tragedy of the situation ... [Bonsu] was planning to go to Africa to study at a university. But then he got in with these guys, they did this thing, and ... his life was finished (Munroe taken from Pines, 1992, p.63).

Wesley Dick was played by Archie Pool, who had been a founder-member of the Brixton-based radical black theatre group RAPP (a detailed discussion about RAPP can be found in 3.1). As Ové explained in 1979, the actor, poet and musician, Pool was the natural choice for the role of Dick, the young poet radicalised by his experiences in a racially hostile London (Phillips, 1979, p.7). In the same way, T-Bone Wilson had a long history of involvement with the Black Power movement and radical black theatre. Wilson’s powerful and brooding intensity as a performer suited him to the complex role of Franklin Davies - a charismatic but flawed individual, who, having drawn Dick and Monroe into Soho’s shady criminal underworld, ultimately betrays them by surrendering to the police.

Filming *A Hole in Babylon*

A Hole in Babylon was filmed on location in and around Ladbroke Grove; an area which was, during the 1970s, inexorably linked to notions of black political expression and struggle. Ladbroke Grove was the locus of Black Power activity in

the 1970s and several radical groups, such as the Black Panthers, had makeshift headquarters in the area. Nearby Notting Hill, another key location in *A Hole in Babylon*, was the site of Carnival; three years prior to filming, heavy-handed policing of the event had culminated in a riot (Sivanandan, 1987, p.34). Ové lived in Ladbroke Grove and had previously used it as the primary location for *Pressure* (Ové, 2009). Ové's intimate knowledge of recondite spaces, such as the black supplementary school where Mrs Monroe is shocked to find her son teaching, the Westbourne Grove housing estate that the three men walk around as they plan the robbery, and the black support centre that Wesley volunteers in, added to the 'authenticity' of *A Hole in Babylon*. As Graham Benson commented in interview, 'Everything was shot on location, we didn't do anything studio at all, we didn't have any sets built' (Benson, 2013). *A Hole in Babylon* utilised the cinema verité approach favoured by Ové; it was filmed on the streets with hand-held cameras and when, at one point, two passers-by had a racist altercation with Archie Pool (in-role as Wesley), Ové insisted that his cameraman, Ken MacMillan, shot it for the film (Wood, 2005). Both Ové and Benson recalled that filming *A Hole in Babylon* was somewhat pressurised and difficult (Ové, 2009, Benson, 2013). It was shot in freezing conditions between January 8 and 26 1979, and an ongoing technician's strike meant that the actors 'weren't allowed normal rehearsals' (Phillips, 1979, p.7).

Horace Ové used the exterior and interior of the actual Knightsbridge Spaghetti House for the film; controversially this included the storeroom where the real hostages had been incarcerated four years earlier. In interview, Graham Benson admitted that there had been initial resistance to the project from some members of the Spaghetti House staff. It seems likely that despite the fact that Monroe, Davies

and Dick did not physically harm their captives, the experience led some hostages to suffer from what we would now term as post-traumatic stress disorder. A 1979 report in the *Evening News*, objecting to the forthcoming screening of *A Hole in Babylon*, stated that four of the victims suffered ‘ongoing psychiatric [problems] and sleep-shattering nightmares’ (Peck, 1979, n.p). Nevertheless, the charismatic Ové was able to persuade the owners of the Spaghetti House to allow filming to take place in the cellar, largely by dint of the fact that he could speak some Italian:

I went to see the head of the Spaghetti House and he looked at me and he thought I was mad to want to come and make this film. But thank God, I had already lived in Italy, so I looked at him and ... [spoke Italian] ... My Italian wasn’t that good, but he wasn’t that bothered ... and he said ‘Yes, come and shoot it’ (Ové, 2009).

Evidently, such was the level of trust eventually built up between Ové and some of the restaurant staff that a few even agreed to be extras (Ové, 2009; Benson, 2013).

The size of the basement also posed some technical challenges for the crew. Graham Benson recalled that the scenes in the cellar were all filmed using an Arriflex BL camera and minimal lighting (Benson, 2013). In interview, he reflected that filming in a dark and confined space would simply not have been possible a few years earlier: ‘we used big arc lights, ‘brutes’ we used to call them, we would not have got them down there [the cellar]’ (Benson, 2013). In the finished film, Ové’s use of hand-held cameras to record shaky close-up shots accentuate the feelings of panic, fear and claustrophobia in both hostages and hostage-takers, as it becomes increasingly clear that the siege is a botched and unplanned endeavour.

Post-production

Once the film footage was in the can, Benson handed it over to Tony Woollard for editing. A top BBC editor, Woollard had the challenging task of ‘marrying’ Ové’s material and the archival newsreel footage (Benson, 2013). Benson recalled that this then-highly innovative process took several attempts. His comments also reveal much about the essentially collaborative nature of television filmmaking:

When we saw the first or maybe the second cut, it really didn’t hang together in the way that we were hoping ... But eventually we did re-cut it ... Tony Woollard [then] had a bit of a go on his own at reshaping the way the story was being told. And then Horace came back [for final editing] (Benson, 2013).

This painstaking process apparently paid off. Such was the seamless appearance of the finished piece, that Ové was asked by some viewers how he had ‘managed to get certain known figures and people in government to appear in [*A Hole in Babylon*]

(Ové in Pines, 1992, p.127).

From the outset, both Benson and Ové had agreed that *A Hole in Babylon* should have a reggae soundtrack. This element they felt, was essential for the film’s black political authenticity (Benson, 2013). Given that most of the budget had been spent at this point, Benson suggested that library ‘source material’ should be used (Benson, 2013). He recalled saying to Ové: ‘There’s loads and loads of appropriate music on disc’ (Benson, 2013). Ové, however, was adamant that original music should be composed for the play and that, as with *Pressure*, he would write the lyrics (Benson, 2013). To Benson’s initial consternation, Ové proposed that a black musician and composer, Sammy Abu, should be flown over from Los Angeles to record the soundtrack in London (Benson, 2013). Benson refused Ové’s request, but the charismatic Ové, who was accustomed to ‘calling in favours’ on previous low-

budget projects such as *Pressure*, managed to persuade Sammy Abu to come to London at his own expense (Benson, 2013). Benson then made it clear that he would only be able to pay Abu ‘a very small amount of money’ (Benson, 2013). As Benson later explained: ‘it is a myth that we always went over-budget in the BBC in those days. Actually, coming in on budget and delivering on time was a source of pride [for a producer]. And of course, you were always thinking about your next project’ (Benson, 2013). He was therefore astounded when Abu arrived at Lime Grove recording studios with an entourage of musicians who were clearly working for free (Benson, 2013). He remembered the energy and atmosphere of the (highly unorthodox) BBC recording session:

There were all these sort of way out musicians. It was fantastic, actually, I had a great day and most of the night. And what I remember very clearly is the tweed-jacketed fairisle sweated soundmen in Lime Grove being completely captivated by this session. And when it got to the time where they would usually say, ‘We’ve got to go now, otherwise it’s overtime’, they completely waived everything and carried on ... And we were there until about 3 o’clock in the morning ... I remember that it was a really remarkable thing. And so we got this great score (Benson, 2013).

Pre-transmission

In interview, Horace Ové stated that the police had put pressure on the BBC to ban *A Hole in Babylon* from being broadcast on the grounds that its depiction of armed policemen was detrimental to their image:

Well, when the police came [in *A Hole in Babylon*] they came with guns. Well, in those days, they [the police] never admitted that they had guns ... And in my play they used guns, so they tried to ban the film. The producer though, he backed me up because he knew I was telling the truth (Ové, 2009).

Although Graham Benson was unable to remember this particular incident, he recalled being highly aware that the police were unhappy that the Spaghetti House siege was due to be re-examined on television, ‘frankly it was [an event] that the

police would much rather have not turned up again' (Benson, 2013). As Nazareth commented in *Time Out*, it was the depiction of an actual case that the police found so unnerving: that the police had guns perhaps blurred the lines of who the *real* 'gangsters' were (1979, p.26). He perceptively pointed out that:

[The police] ... made problems over the use of dummy guns in the Spaghetti House film, though not all BBC productions [at this time] got the same treatment. The BBC police series [*Target* (1977-78)?] did not have any difficulty filming machine guns in use. Cops and robbers, they didn't mind. Spaghetti House, they did (Nazareth, 1979, p.26).

The controversial nature of *A Hole in Babylon's* subject matter also meant that it received a good deal of media coverage prior to its television broadcast on Thursday November 29 1979 (Benson, 2013). Ové and Benson had insisted on an open set, and both had talked freely to the press while the film was being shot in January 1979 (Benson, 2013). As the date of transmission approached, certain sections of the press mooted that a sympathetic portrayal of 'three black hooligans' was irresponsible and should be banned by the BBC (Benson, 2013). Indeed, Martin Jackson and Paul Donovan, writing in the *Daily Mail* two days before *A Hole in Babylon* was due to go out, opined:

Viewers may be shocked, outraged that convicted criminals – now serving a total of 56 years in prison - are depicted ... as heroes ... *A Hole in Babylon* [is] blurring the edges between fact and fiction ... but they are not the events. They are not history. The audience needs to be warned that they are merely make-believe (Jackson and Donovan, 1979, n.p.).

Not all of the advance press coverage about *A Hole in Babylon* was negative. *The Observer* for example, stated that it was 'a sympathetic and honest reconstruction of the events that led up to the siege, centred the fairly hopeless lives of the three black gunmen involved' ('Mixed up Motives', 1979, n.a., n.p.). However, Graham Benson recalled that what he termed as 'various sorts of murmurings ... reached a peak' the weekend before the programme was due to be aired (Benson, 2013). Unsurprisingly,

these concerns came to the attention of BBC senior management and Benson was summoned to an emergency meeting with Director of Television Programmes, Alasdair Milne, on Monday November 26 1979 (Benson, 2013). Milne - who had been instrumental in withdrawing two previous plays from the schedules - *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976) and *Scum* (1977) - pointedly asked Benson, ‘Do I have a problem? Am I going to have a problem with this?’ (Benson, 2013: Cooke, 2003, pp.96-97). Benson recalled a long exchange, during which he was asked to provide a detailed description and defence of the content of *A Hole in Babylon* (Benson, 2013). Benson did not shirk from admitting to Milne that, ‘[the BBC] will be questioned, criticised and maybe even attacked [after *A Hole in Babylon* is shown on television]’, but he was also quick to place emphasis on the collaborative nature of the production: ‘I said [to Alasdair Milne] ‘it’s an example of a terrific cooperation between the Drama Department, the BBC Plays Department and the News Department’. He was *very* happy to hear that’ (Benson, 2013).

Interestingly, towards the end of the conversation, Benson offered Milne an advance screening of *A Hole in Babylon*, but by this stage, Milne appears to have made the decision that the programme should be transmitted as planned (Benson, 2013).

Benson recollected that he left the meeting ‘completely comfortable that I had dealt with the issue responsibly, professionally’ (Benson, 2013). By the time that Benson walked down to the fifth floor of Television Centre to report back to Head of Plays, James Cellan-Jones, Milne had telephoned to give the go-ahead for *A Hole in Babylon* to be transmitted:

I went down to Jimmy [Cellan-Jones] and he said, ‘that’s okay, Alasdair has just rung and he said that he’s had a good conversation with you’. He’s quite happy, he doesn’t want to see it. He’ll watch it [when it is broadcast on television] on Thursday night (Benson, 2013).

It says much about Benson's tenacity as a producer that he was able to persuade Milne to broadcast *A Hole in Babylon* despite the evident controversy that surrounded the play even before it was aired. Indeed, it brings to mind Horace Ové's comment in interview that 'BBC producers in the 1970s were *very* powerful' and enjoyed a high level of autonomy within the organisation (Ové, 2009). However, a more nuanced impression of Alasdair Milne's Directorship (and the working practices of the BBC in the 1970s generally) also emerges from this case. As Benson recalled:

On Friday morning, I came in [to Television Centre] after *A Hole in Babylon* had gone out the previous evening and he [Alisdair Milne] telephoned me and said, 'very good, I really thought that was a marvellous piece of work. Yes, it is a bit controversial but that's fine, that's what we are here for'. That was really an example of management and editorship ... the way the BBC worked [then] (Benson, 2013).

The production history of *A Hole in Babylon*, as reconstructed largely through detailed interviews with its producer, Graham Benson and director Horace Ové, reveals much about practitioner agency within the industrial context of the BBC in the late 1970s. *A Hole in Babylon* is shown to be a highly collaborative project which was strongly dependent on what Benson termed as the 'collegiate' nature of the BBC at this time. Benson's pragmatic decision to use news footage, for example, was facilitated by the fact that he knew the Head of BBC News, who was able to locate the stock and clear the rights for him (Benson, 2013). As a BBC producer in the late 1970s, Benson clearly enjoyed a high level of autonomy over the project but it is interesting to reflect that, when interviewed, Ové felt no sense that his authorial voice had been compromised (Ové, 2009). There were familiar areas of the production process where Ové exercised a large degree of power, such as the casting and shooting. However, it is also clear from Benson's interview that Ové

had the final say in the editing process and that Benson, whilst initially resistant, wholly capitulated when it came to *A Hole in Babylon*'s original, and political reggae soundtrack.

The story of the making of *A Hole in Babylon* is also telling in terms of BBC managerial practices in the late 1970s. From Benson's interview, it becomes evident that Alasdair Milne did not know that a play had been made about the Spaghetti House siege until he read about it following the press screening (Benson, 2013). Indeed Benson stated that:

There was very, very little communication between [us and] the sixth floor, the top, the bosses upstairs [in Television Centre]. Programmes got made and if there was a question to be asked then you [as the producer] dealt with it (Benson, 2013).

In his memoirs, James Cellan-Jones wrote about the way in which a 'hands-off' approach on the part of management permeated BBC drama in the 1970s:

Every month I had a routine meeting with Alasdair Milne and with the Controllers of BBC1 and BBC2... I and ... the other heads of department were regarded as experts in our own fields and expected to produce the goods unsupervised. The autonomy I enjoyed I tried to pass down to the producers and directors ... (Cellan-Jones, 2005, p.66).

It is perhaps instructive to reflect that it was within this particular industrial context that a *Play for Today* providing a damning political indictment of 'white institutions', came to be aired on the BBC at a time of deep racial unrest in Britain. However, it is important to note that *A Hole in Babylon* was not the sole example of the BBC's liberal instincts allowing space for the politically radical voices of black writers. A further notable exemplar is the BBC *Open Door* production of Jamal Ali's play *Black Feet in the Snow* (which will be discussed in detail in part 3.2).

This case study demonstrates the way in which interview testimony enables the insights gained about the politics, liberal opportunities and collaboration to come to the fore in the way that archival documents may not. Furthermore, the production history of *A Hole in Babylon* once again highlights the way in which the fictional form was seemingly less constrained than the factual when it came to issues of race politics in the 1970s. In short, the fictional form provided the freedom to broadcast contentious discourses on television in a way that the factual ones did not.

Conclusion

The case studies in Part 2 have not only showcased the value of the imaginative interpretation of a variety of source material, but they have also highlighted the importance of researching production and reception contexts in understanding the nature of black expression in the 1970s. This approach will be pursued in Part 3 but here the texts themselves will take centre-stage, enabling an applied study of creative agency. Several key themes have emerged from Part 2. These include: the role of the producer as gatekeeper/enabler, networks of collaboration between black practitioners and white and black practitioners, and the ways in which the black voice is able to find expression in the text (as well as the constraints and compromises which limit it). Mindful of these themes, Part 3 will provide a detailed investigation the creative journey of an individual black practitioner, Jamal Ali.

PART 3 –BLACK AGENCY AND EXPRESSION AND ITS CROSS-MEDIA ADAPTATION: AN EXTENDED CASE STUDY ON JAMAL ALI

Introduction

In this section, I will draw on the methodological practices and themes that have emerged from Part 2 in order to explore the work of a single black writer, Jamal Ali, whose writing has hitherto been largely neglected. Ali's life and work provides a unique example of the development of a black voice in British film and television in the 1970s. Ali found creative expression in a variety of forms including poetry, theatre, television and film; as such, his work exemplifies the practitioner crossover discussed throughout this thesis. Drawing on my detailed interviews with Ali and archival research, I will examine the way in which his authorial voice was shaped and constrained by the different media forms and institutional conditions that it met. Part 2 was necessarily concerned with the process of adapting writers' work across a range of different forms. In Part 3, I concentrate on the way in which an individual's work is transformed through the process of adaptation for theatre, television and film. In this way, part 3.1 explores Ali's poetry and his involvement with, and writing for, radical black theatre in Brixton. Part 3.2 explores the adaptation of Ali's stage play *Black Feet in the Snow* for BBC 2's *Open Door* strand. In 3.3, I utilise my interview material from both Ali and the director Anthony Simmons in order to examine the contentious adaptation of Ali's play *Dark Days, Light Nights* for the cinema (*Black Joy*). Finally, in part 3.4, I draw on audience testimony in order to consider local responses to *Black Joy*'s screening in Brixton.

3.1 – Background, biography and theatre

Jamal Ali moved from his homeland, Guyana, to Brixton at the age of twenty in 1962 (Jamal Ali, personal communication, September 18, 2008). A trained accountant, it was his initial intention to find work in the profession in London. However, these ambitions were thwarted and he became increasingly involved in radical black activism. This is not least due to the fact that his arrival in the capital coincided with a period of extreme racism and hostility towards black migrants. Indeed, in the words of the historian Peter Fryer, racism was effectively ‘institutionalized, legitimized and nationalized’ at this time (1987, p.380). In the year that Ali came to Brixton, the controversial first Commonwealth Immigrants Bill became law (Fryer, 1987, p.381). With its emphasis on immigrant entry control and deportation measures, the subsequent Commonwealth Immigrants Act had the effect of ‘officially equating blackness with second-class citizenship [and] with the status of the undesirable immigrant’ (1987, p.382). As I have outlined in part 2.1, black people found themselves hugely disadvantaged in key areas such as employment, housing, policing and education. The 1965 Race Relations Act was implemented to try to counter racial discrimination but it was a flimsy and ineffectual piece of legislation (Sivanandan, 1987, p.17: see also part 2.1). Ironically, one of the few people to be prosecuted under the Act was the Trinidadian Michael X (Michael de Freitas), the founder of a British black power group, the Racial Adjustment Action Society (Sivanandan, 1987, p.17). In interview, Jamal Ali’s comments on the socio-political events of the 1960s and 1970s were characteristically to the point. ‘It was’, he said, ‘a time when the white brethren were taking the piss on the black brethren. I include the powers that be.’ (Ali, 2008).

From the late 1960s onwards, some members of the black community began to join forces to mobilize against ‘mounting racism in Britain’ and a number of small, but highly vocal, ‘black militant organisations’ were established in several large cities in Britain (Sivanandan, 1987, p.23: p.30). A proliferation of such groups set up in London, and included, among others, the Black Liberation Front (BLF), the Black Panthers, and the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS) (Sivanandan, 1987, pp.30-31). During this period, the Ladbroke Grove and Portobello Road areas of Notting Hill became key locations for the makeshift headquarters of some of the organisations (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.18). All of the groups had ‘black power ideologies’ at their core (Sivanandan, 1987, p.30). Whilst Bunce and Field have persuasively argued that in Britain, the ‘interpretation of black power’ varied from organisation to organisation, they were nevertheless consistent in their promotion of black self-determination and the fight against racial oppression (by dint of ‘direct and violent action’ if deemed necessary) (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.1: Cashmore, 1988, pp. 30-31). Black power eschewed ‘white’ notions of assimilation and instead ‘fought for a new black value system’; one which was heavily based on ‘black African’ principles (Mullard, 1985, p.37). In this way, it was argued that the creation of black cultural, political and economic institutions would ‘eliminate blacks’ reliance’ on an intrinsically oppressive ‘white system’ (Cashmore, 1988, pp.30-31).

It has been asserted that two key events added impetus to the birth of the black power movement in Britain (and may also help to account for its strong concentration in London) (Bunce and Field, 2010, pp.2-3). The first of these was the heavily-reported visit of Malcolm X to London and Birmingham just weeks ahead of

his assassination in February 1965 (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.3; Cashmore, 1988, p.176). The second was the two-week long Dialectics of Liberation conference, which was held at the Roundhouse and other venues in London's Camden in the summer of 1967 (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.1). Intended to 'provide a theoretical critique of the self-destructive nature of the modern world and practical advice concerning future liberation', the conference gave a platform to the central players of the 1960s counterculture movement (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.2). Included amongst such luminaries of the movement as R. D. Laing, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, was the American Black Power activist, Stokely Carmichael (Bunce and Field, 2010, p.2). In a series of electrifying speeches, Carmichael put forward the argument that British blacks should see themselves as part of a 'world-wide' struggle against 'white Western society' (Mullard, 1985, p.37). Carmichael's comments were picked up by the British press and a series of high-profile reports accused him of 'preaching racial hatred' (cited in Bruce and Field, 2010, p.2). In a direct response to Carmichael's appearance at the conference, the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, took the decision to ban 'his future entry into Britain' (Mullard, 1985, p.37). According to Bunce and Field, this move had two unintended consequences; it afforded Carmichael a martyr-like status among black communities in Britain and led directly to the creation of the British Black Panthers in 1968 (2010, p.3).

Jamal Ali was living in Brixton at a time when certain sections of its black community were becoming highly politicised; indeed the Black Panthers had set up one of their first headquarters at Brixton's Shakespeare Road (Laura, 2007, p.1). In interview, Ali explained that his experiences in 1960s London contributed to his personal politicisation (Ali, 2008). Ali was shocked by the level of racism that he

encountered and, in common with many skilled black migrants to Britain, he found that an unofficial 'colour-bar' left him unable to secure work in the profession for which he was qualified (Ali, 2008). In Brixton, Ali associated with a creative and politically motivated group of friends. Among them was T-Bone Wilson, a poet and playwright who would later also work as an actor in film, stage and television throughout the 1970s (Jamal Ali, personal communication, March 12, 2012). Although Ali was predominately engaged in a series of menial jobs at this point, perhaps encouraged by his friends, towards the end of the 1960s, he began to write poetry. Ali's nascent involvement with radical black politics at this time is further underlined by the fact that in 1969, he took part in a fund-raising poetry evening to support both Tony Soares (a founder member of the British Black Panthers) and *Grassroots*, the Black Liberation Front's newspaper (Papers of Ansel Wong, 1969). Among those contributing to the event at the Half Moon in Aldgate was the black activist and poet, John la Rose, and the poet and playwright Mustapha Matura (Papers of Ansel Wong, 1969).

Disillusioned by a lack of opportunities in his chosen profession, Ali left Brixton in the winter of 1969 to work as an accountant assistant for the American Army based in Germany (Ali, 2008). Ali's decision to work for the American Army during the time of the Vietnam War alienated some of his friends in London. Ali later recalled receiving letters accusing him of 'selling out' (Ali, 2012). However, in interview, Ali cited his stint with the 105th Finance Division in Stuttgart as being the major catalyst for his subsequent writing career (Ali, 2008: Ali, 2012). Writing, Ali stated, was initially a way of combating the loneliness and isolation that he experienced in Germany and the poetry and short pieces of prose that he wrote at this time were

largely autobiographical in nature (Ali, 2008). Although the work from this period is now lost, in interviews I conducted with him, Ali spoke about the way in which he used the time in Germany to reflect on his earlier experiences as a migrant to Brixton (Ali, 2008, 2012). He recalled that when he came from Guyana to Brixton, his initial impression was that of finding himself in a disorientating ‘hustle and bustle metropolis’ (Ali, 2008). Ali described his dismay at discovering that he had come to an environment that was grey ‘cold and damp’ and still prone to impenetrable smogs (Ali, 2008). What was worse was the searing racism that he encountered in his daily life; people shouted abuse at him in the street and on several occasions he was beaten so severely, that in his words, ‘blood run from my body’ (Ali, 2008). In time, Ali began to write on a daily basis and, despite his family’s insistence that accountancy was a career ‘cut out for him’, he made the decision to become a fulltime writer. It was with this intention that he returned to live in Brixton at the end of 1971 (Ali, 2008).

The Long Angry Lament (1972)

On his return to Brixton, Jamal Ali continued his friendship with T-Bone Wilson, who offered support and encouragement with his writing. Early in 1972, both men met Rudolph Kizerman, a charismatic poet from Barbados, who had enjoyed cult success with his 1968 book, *Stand up in the World* (Ali, 2012). Kizerman had undertaken extensive literary tours in the United States and had consequently forged friendships with key American black cultural and political figures such as the writer James Baldwin and the actor Calvin Lockhart (Ali, 2012). Ali and Wilson were flattered when Kizerman proposed that the three of them should collaborate in presenting a public poetry event in London (Ali, 2012). Ali, Kizerman and Wilson

asserted that the primary objective of the event would be political; poetry, they agreed, was an effective tool ‘in the struggle to develop social consciousness’ (‘The Long’, 1972, p.266). All were keen that poetry should be presented ‘as a multi-arts phenomenon’ and to this end it was decided that the evening would incorporate music and dancing (‘The Long’, 1972, p. 266). Kizerman approached the Polytechnic of Central London, who agreed to host the event, *The Long Angry Lament*, on June 9 1972 (‘The Long’, 1972, p. 266). Ali and Wilson undertook most of the organisation for the event and by emphasising their connection with Kizerman, they managed to secure the poets Andrew Salkey and Cecil Rajendra, both of whom agreed to take part for free (Ali, 2012). Ali and Wilson also hired musicians and ‘a set of African drummers’, whose job it was to improvise with the poetry. Ali later recalled the atmosphere of the performance:

There was us in the [Central London] Polytechnic. And we were doing this thing and the place was packed. Crowds of people, because we had people from Africa and the West Indies ... and they come and bring their drums and keep a racket and everybody was jumping (Ali, 2012).

The Long Angry Lament received positive reviews in both *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Race Today* and Ali was eager that it would not just be a one-off event (Ali, 2012): ‘I said, we *can’t* just leave this thing, maybe we can do something that can extend *The Long Angry Lament*’ (Ali, 2012). Kizerman and Wilson were evidently much less enthusiastic to continue with the project, ostensibly because of other work commitments but perhaps also because there was a disjuncture between their poetry and that of Ali’s (Ali, 2012). Certainly, at the performance, Ali discerned that his work had a different focus from that of Kizerman and Wilson, whose poems for *The Long Angry Lament* drew heavily on images of Satan and the apocalypse to talk about racial oppression: ‘A lot of it [*The Long Angry Lament*] was

some hysterical thing ... And I said to myself, man, you know I sound out of sync because my other two comrades [Kizerman and Wilson], they were going in to all this kind of esoteric scene' (Ali, 2012). Ali, on the other hand, was keen to write poetry that drew on his observations and experiences of Brixton to document the struggles of black communities. An example of this can be seen in the following extract from one of his early poems, *The Breakdown*:

Dem shut up youth clubs/ And youth centres/ Causing brainstorm/ And high temperature/
Dem harassing and youth/ Resisting sussing/ Dem busting youth/ With black skin/ No use
protesting brethren/ When Babylon busting heads (Ali, 1973).

Among other issues affecting Brixton's black communities, *The Breakdown* deals with youth unemployment, police stop-and-search policies and police brutality.

Both in terms of content and use of language, Ali's poetry can be seen as a clear forerunner to the work of black dub poets of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, Norman Beaton has written about the strong influence that Ali's poetry had on both Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah (1986, p.170). In terms of content, Ali's writing about Brixton exposed what the Jamaican poet, James Berry, has called 'a collective [black] psyche laden with anguish and rage' (Berry, 1984, p.xii).

Moreover, like the dub poets who followed him, Ali's use of an emerging diasporic 'West Indian/British' vernacular in many of his poems can be seen as a powerful act of resistance (King, 2004, p.110). As Bruce King has written, for the dub poets, 'spelling, like grammar, imitates actual West Indian usage in England and contributes to authenticity as well as signalling rebellion' (2004, p.110). These attributes can clearly be seen in Ali's poetry (and later on in his plays). Ali's use of colloquial terms like 'dem', 'busting' and 'Babylon' (a contemporaneous black term for the police or white hegemony more generally) and his attention to rhythm in the actual spoken word, was the result of a deliberate decision on his part to document

what he saw as a ‘new’ language which was evolving among Brixton’s young black diaspora:

I learned to write from the street ... You will find things in my work that literally came out from the circumstances that I was in, the environment that I was in, the places where I was hearing language being formed. [A] New kind of language [was] being formed ... I take what I literally heard some person say to some person (Ali, 2012).

It must be noted however, that from the outset, Ali also wrote extensively about his youth in Guyana. Braziel and Mannur have written about the way in which ‘diasporic subjects experience double (and even plural) identifications that are constitutive of hybrid forms of identity’ (2003, p.5). Much of Ali’s work suggests a powerful interplay (and disjuncture) between his youthful memories of ‘moonlit nights and tales in Guyana’ and the oft-alienating ‘here and now’ of Brixton, replete with ‘brutality’, ‘cold’ and ‘sussing’ (Ali, 2008; Ali, 2012). The need to capture and record cultural memories of Guyana was explicit in a (now sadly lost) poem that Ali wrote and performed in the early 1970s. As he explained in interview:

I was into that cultural thing [in Guyana] because I wrote a poem that had to do with Juju voodoo. And I was trying to recreate in the poem, a scene where local people exorcise [a demon in a man] (he probably has some sickness or something, but the culture is that he is possessed). And to get him dispossessed you’ve got to show some serious licks [beatings] for him ... And when I was a kid, I witnessed all these things (Ali, 2012).

What is evident is the way in which Ali’s writing sought to document and engage with black diasporic experiences. Wendy Walters has argued that the very act of ‘writing diaspora ... is part of the construction of an alternative community’, one that is deeply politicised and has at its core ‘the search for viable homes for viable selves’ (2005, xviii). Walters suggests that it is this personal notion of actual or imagined homelessness/statelessness that is central to diasporic identity and creative

production (2005, xviii). *On Trial*, a poem written shortly after Ali's return from Germany, dealt explicitly with the problematic notion of home:

Searching searching searching searching/ For what?/ And that the crystal did not show./
Coming coming coming back/ To where?/ There was nowhere.../ Roaming roaming ten
years./ Just searching for a home./ Onward onward marching/ Marching endlessly/ And what
found I?/ Nothing, that will end this instability./ Backward, forward, going, coming./
Nowhere is my home/ ...(Ali, 1984, p.50).

This diasporic preoccupation with the physical and metaphorical 'search for home' can be seen as a central and continuing theme both in Ali's writing and his artistic practice. The creative diasporic act 'of the construction of an alternative community' would become even more apparent as he moved into the world of black radical theatre and playwriting.

The Radical Alliance of Poets and Players (RAPP)

Encouraged by his experience of working on *The Long Angry Lament*, in 1972 Ali founded RAPP (Radical Alliance of Poets and Players) a Brixton-based theatre group (Ali, 2012). Consisting of non-professional black actors and musicians drawn from the Brixton community, RAPP was created as a direct and militant response to the turbulent race relations of early 1970s London (Ali, 2008). Ali's vision with RAPP was to provide theatre *for, by and about* Brixton's black community. He had witnessed the ill-effects that unemployment and racism had on some of Brixton's youths and saw RAPP as a way of positively channelling the energies of 'those kids who were leaning towards badness' (Ali, 2008). In providing a platform to those marginalised from broader society, Ali asserted that RAPP could 'bring attention to the powers that be ... about certain inequalities within the community' (Ali, 2012). RAPP was highly innovative in nature and has been described not only as an early

example of a black theatre company, but also one of the first to tackle socio-political issues through a ‘fusion of poetry, songs, music and theatre’ (Lloyd, 1982, p.25).

Echoing Brechtian notions of dramaturgy, which posit ‘theatre not only as a place of entertainment but [as] a moment of political action’ (Turner and Behrndt, 2008, p.68), Jamal Ali described his own practice thus: ‘My theatre was a political campaign. It was all about politics’ (Ali, 2012).

From the outset, Ali saw RAPP as ‘a coalition of community artists’, and he drew both on his own experiences as a black migrant to Brixton and those of the young people in the group to write a series of visceral plays which dealt explicitly with the diasporic experience (Berry, 1984, p. xxvi; Ali, 2012). For RAPP, Ali wrote *Black by Night* (1972), *Two Pieces of Roots* (date unknown), *Twisted Knot* (1972) (a play which would also be performed with the Black Theatre of Brixton) and *Black Feet in the Snow* (1972) (a list of the individual plays is provided in Appendix 1). In interview, Ali summed up the key themes of his early plays thus:

It was literally political ... [The plays were about] minority and race. You know, the first thing when you look [for employment], it is ‘sorry no this, sorry no that ... sorry no blacks need apply. Sorry the job has just gone. So it was dealing with racism and probably much deeper than that ... also [how] we as newly-came people to this country were trying to understand our host-nation ... this is the treatment we get and this is what [I] have to write about (Ali, 2012).

Working with young people who had no previous acting experience was challenging and Ali recalled that ‘several months’ were spent rehearsing in the Black People’s Information Centre in Ladbroke Grove (Ali, 2012). When money was short (which was often), RAPP rehearsed in local parks or in Ali’s front room (Ali, 2012). In interview, Ali stated that the ‘rhythmic, poetic’ and ‘real’ language that he used in his plays made it easier for inexperienced actors to remember their lines: ‘people talk

it as poetry' (Ali, 2012). As with his earlier poetry, Ali set much store by recreating what he called, 'natural voices' in his plays; the argot and idiom of Brixton's young black diaspora (Ali, 2012). As Keir Elam noted of the stage version of *Black Feet in the Snow*, the actors spoke in a dazzling black vernacular, which was a hybrid of 'Island acrolet' and 'urban street' (1995, p.182).

As RAPP did not have a permanent base, the plays were staged at various venues in London. When possible, RAPP performed at theatres in and around Brixton (such as the Dark and Light at Longfield Hall and the Oval House in Kennington) as Ali was keen that the local Brixton community should have easy geographical access to their work (Ali, 2012). As Ali's daughter, Sibihan Agard commented in interview:

Jamal was something of a Messiah not just to the theatre audience but to the people. Writing as a witness, witnessing what was going on in the community and writing it and presenting it to the people in a place that was safe, and a place that was accessible for them (Sibihan Agard, 2012).

Away from Brixton, the then newly-opened Keskidee Centre at King's Cross also provided RAPP and its audiences with a safe and sympathetic environment, as did The Commonwealth Institute in Kensington (Ali, 2012). However, RAPP also toured around Britain. For Ali, it was important that RAPP's uncompromising message should be conveyed not only to the immediate black community but to white audiences too. To this end, RAPP performed at 'community venues, Festivals, colleges, and universities' around the country (Lloyd, 1982, p.25). As Ali later said of this aspect of RAPP's work:

I never get pelted on the stage but I went to some weird communities all over the place [with RAPP]. There would be no black people in the audience. I would see all these white faces and I would think, 'oh God, I wonder if there are any racists in this audience' [laughs]. But honestly, because you must know by now that I never hold back ... I was never afraid (Ali, 2012).

Errol Lloyd, writing in *Artrage*, stated that, ‘the impact of [RAPP’s early] work was immediate and they were in [wide] demand’ (1982, p.25). Ali also recalled that RAPP quickly became ‘very popular’ and that they were soon performing in places such as ‘Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh’ (Ali, 2012). Nevertheless, RAPP was constantly hampered by financial problems (Ali, 2012). What little money the group made from the box office was ploughed back into hiring the next venue, and in interview, Ali remembered that he personally made next to nothing throughout his involvement with RAPP (Ali, 2012). Moreover, obtaining external funding for RAPP’s work was a challenge (Ali, 2012). In interview, Ali recalled that he had to ‘get money from wherever’ (Ali, 2012). RAPP received small sums from The Arts Council and the Greater London Arts Association, but their support was at best, erratic (Ali, 2012). It is perhaps testimony to Ali’s tenacity and pragmatism that he managed to obtain small amounts of money for RAPP from sources as diverse as ‘Marks and Spencer’ and ‘the Libyan Revolutionary Fund’ (Ali, 2012).

In 1974, RAPP received even greater exposure when *Black Feet in the Snow* was televised as part of BBC2’s community strand of programmes, *Open Door* (Ali, 2012). *Black Feet in the Snow* will be considered in detail in the next section, but it is worth noting at this point that the broadcasting of the televised version of the play was largely responsible for Ali’s friendship and professional association with the Guyanese actor, Norman Beaton (who, by 1974, was already famous for his theatrical work). Beaton later recalled that he was unaware of Ali’s work until he saw the programme, which evidently had a huge impact on him (1986, p.170):

I had seen Jamal’s *Black Feet in the Snow* ... on the BBC ... It was a powerful polemic laced with apocalyptic poetical images which are Jamal’s forte ... Of all our emerging writers I felt that Jamal was the person who had his fingers firmly on the pulse of the people (Beaton, 1986, p.170).

Ali and Beaton met, by coincidence, a couple of weeks after *Black Feet in the Snow* was aired (Ali, 2008). In interview, Ali described the occasion:

[laughing] We met in a betting shop [in Brixton]. I was passing through, he was mucking around or something and when he heard my voice, you know, which he recognised from Guyana and right away addressed me as 'Banna'. He [recognised] me obviously because I was on television ... we went on to where he lived and then we had a talk and immediately he wanted to work with me (Ali, 2008).

At the end of 1974, exhausted from two years of struggles with funding bodies, a gruelling touring schedule and the difficulties connected with managing what were essentially enthusiastic but largely inexperienced young performers, Ali ended his association with RAPP (Ali, 2008; Ali, 2012). It had become increasingly difficult, he said, for 'team members to pull together' and by this time he was also keen to start a new project with Norman Beaton (Ali, 2008). As Ali stated in interview: 'They went off one way, the rest of the group, and I went off [in another direction]' (Under the new leadership of Archie Pool, RAPP was to continue until the mid-1980s, and was later to place a stronger emphasis on music-making than had been the case during Ali's tenure) (Ali, 2008; Lloyd, 1982, p.25).

The Black Theatre of Brixton (1974 -78)

At the end of 1974, together with Norman Beaton and an American actor, Rufus Collins, Jamal Ali formed The Black Theatre of Brixton (Beaton, 1986, p.169). The project evolved from the Dark and Light, which was contemporaneously described as 'the first multi-racial theatre club' (Bryden, 1972, p.261). It is worth outlining the history of the Dark and Light since it reveals much about the culture of black theatre in which Ali was immersed. The Dark and Light opened in Longfield Hall, Knatchbull Road, Brixton, at the end of 1971 and was founded by Frank Cousins

(Bryden, 1972, p.261). Cousins migrated from Jamaica to London in 1960 and trained as an actor at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Bryden, 1972, p.261). Although he found steady sources of work touring with repertory theatres, and taking minor roles in television and radio, Cousins had grown increasingly frustrated by the lack of opportunities for black British actors (Bryden, 1972, p.261). Whilst he had played in *Martin Luther King* at the Greenwich Theatre and in Minos Volonakis' all-black production of Genet's *The Blacks*, much of Cousins' work during this time reflected what Colin Chambers has called 'the fate common to black actors' in the early 1970s; namely demeaning roles in pantomimes or minor walk-on parts in 'mainstream' plays (Bryden, 1972, p.261; Chambers, 2011, p. 141). Cousins argued that this situation was not helped by a white-dominated drama school system which commonly deployed the practice of training black actors to speak and act like '[pseudo]black Englishmen with upper-class accent[s]' (taken from Bryden, 1972, p.261). As he stated in a contemporaneous interview for *Race Today*:

It didn't actually work because the same people who produced this [accent] then turn around and say: 'You don't sound like a West Indian'. The West Indian or black actor had a confused identity. He didn't know where the hell he belonged ... His own accent, everything, has been screwed up by the drama school (Cousins taken from Bryden, 1972, p.261)

Cousins realised that the only way to remedy these related problems was to set up his own theatre company (Bryden, 1972, p.261). The Dark and Light was an ambitious project and one of its stated aims was to 'promote understanding between people of different races through the media of the performing arts' (Chambers, 2011, p.140). To this end, Cousins was keen to avoid the militant rhetoric of black power and this was reflected in the company's name (Chambers, 2011, 140). According to Cousins,

‘dark’ represented the theatre’s auditorium and ‘light’ its stage, although he acknowledged that most of its visitors took the name to be indicative of the company’s multiracial agenda (Chambers, 2011, p.140). Among the performances staged at the Dark and Light were Fuagard’s *Blood Knot*, Hendricks’ *Evolution of the Blues*, LeRoi Jones’ *The Slave*, a couple of Caribbean pantomimes and a two RAPP productions written by Jamal Ali, *Two Pieces of Roots* and *Twisted Knot* (Chambers, 2011, p.142-143). The Dark and Light also toured widely with plays such as Robert Lamb’s *Raas* (Chambers, 2011, p.142). Nevertheless, throughout its tenure, the Dark and Light faced a continual struggle for funding. Chambers has written that Cousins complained that ‘the Arts Council saw the Dark and Light as an amateur community effort’ and did not afford it proper support (2011, p.141). The theatre also suffered from the apathy of local audiences which was not helped by its location in the hinterland between Brixton and Camberwell (Chambers, 2011, p.141). Four years of worry and hard work with the Dark and Light eventually took their toll on Cousins’ health and this, allied with crippling financial problems, necessitated its closure (Beaton, 1986, p.132).

The first thing that Jamal Ali, Norman Beaton and Rufus Collins did, on formally taking control of the theatre, was to change its name from the Dark and Light to the Black Theatre of Brixton (Beaton, 1986, p.170). This was because they saw a need for Brixton’s black community ‘to have a theatre with which they could unequivocally identify’ (Beaton, 1986, p.170). The change of title signified the new team’s much ‘more radical stance’ (Chambers, 2011, p.144). According to Jamal Ali, his intention for the Black Theatre of Brixton ‘was to bring experience from the streets, from the ghetto...on to the stage’ (Ali, 2008). Indeed, under Ali’s influence,

the Black Theatre of Brixton was explicitly political and from the outset it aimed 'to root the theatre in the needs of those living in the front line' (Chambers, 2011, p.144). To this end, Ali, Beaton and Collins undertook extensive research to find out what local black people required from a theatre (Beaton, 1986, p.170). According to Beaton, they spoke to prominent community leaders who echoed Ali's concerns about the high levels of alienation experienced by Brixton's black communities, especially among its youth (1986, p.170). In this way it was decided that like RAPP before it, an important function of the newly-formed theatre would be to provide a positive outlet for otherwise disaffected black youths (Ali, 2008). Sentiments to this effect were expressed by Ali in a letter to the Arts Council in May 1975:

[The Black Theatre of Brixton's] principle aim for youth, especially black youth, is to bring them off the streets and to give self-expression and confidence. The problems of the street of Brixton, the muggings, the violence, vandalism etc., which we see daily will not be solved by our efforts alone, but we at least hope to try and alleviate these...(Ali taken from Beaton, 1986, p. 171).

In addition to his role as the Black Theatre of Brixton's artistic director, Jamal Ali took charge of the theatre's Community Theatre Project (Beaton, 1986, p. 171: Strick, 1977, p.6). This was an ambitious project which aimed to 'actively involve the whole community' in the Black Theatre of Brixton (Beaton, 1986, p.171). It was mooted that this could be accomplished in two ways. Firstly, 'regular consultations' would be held with the Brixton community about the 'kind of work they wanted to see' both on stage and as street theatre (Beaton, 1986, p.171). Secondly, regular tours of local 'clubs, schools and youth centres' would be undertaken, both to showcase the work of the Black Theatre of Brixton and to recruit new (non-professional) actors (Beaton, 1986, p.171). Drawing on his experience with RAPP, Ali proposed that the Black Theatre of Brixton would 'train the youth in the

community in all theatrical skills, artistic and technical' (Beaton, 1986, p.171). This would be achieved by providing workshops in such areas as 'drama, dance and body movement, music, literature and elocution' (Beaton, 1986, p.170). Like those undertaken with RAPP, Ali's workshops for the theatre placed major emphasis on what he termed as 'authentic black performance'; something which was hugely important in light of Cousins' and others observations about the deadening influence of white-dominated drama schools' teaching on the performances of black actors during the period (Ali, 2012). In interview, Ali explained that he sought an acting style that was as naturalistic as possible: '[Black lived] experience is very important in terms of [speech] and body movement [on stage]. Mannerisms are important ... You have to think about all that when you are portraying people, you have to *know* them' (Ali, 2012).

Although a handful of semi-professional actors trained by the playwright Aubrey Legal-Miller at the Tooting theatre group, 'The Caribbean Showboat' joined the Black Theatre of Brixton, most of the young people involved in it had no previous acting experience (Porter, 1980, p.23). As with RAPP, this posed certain challenges, but for Ali, these were outweighed by the freedom that this allowed him in directing. As Ali explained in interview, the non-professional actors from his local community had not had exuberant and expansive body movement or 'natural ways of speaking' trained out of them by drama school (Ali, 2012). Ali encouraged his actors to draw on their lived experience 'on the street' when performing; this, he argued, was the key to authentic black performance (Ali, 2012). It was for this reason that, throughout his career, Ali favoured working with non-professional actors or those

professional actors such as Norman Beaton or Calvin Simpson, who he considered to have ‘a true understanding of the street’ (Ali, 2012).

The diasporic nature of the Black Theatre of Brixton was inherent in the performance style of its actors. Michael McMillan has written that: ‘... [British] Black Theatre [can be seen] through the lens of the African continuum, which can embrace the diverse narratives of the past as a way to transform the present and future’ (2006, p.61). The African and Caribbean tradition of orature was strongly apparent in the approach taken by the Black Theatre of Brixton; emphasis was placed on a very physical form of story-telling which harked back to (and re-imagined) the folk tales and ‘yard-talk’ of ‘back home’ (Ali, 2012). A contemporaneous review of the Black Theatre of Brixton’s production of Steve Wilmer’s *The Jolly Green Soldier*, in the *South London Press* newspaper, provides an interesting insight into a performance-style that clearly embraced the tradition of orature:

If Brixton theatregoers had been more accustomed to the passive variety of acting ... they were in for an active acting surprise. Rufus Collins, the first of this exotic new species to tread the boards in SW2, convulsed with maniacal laughter on the stage. He ranted, whispered, fell over, got up, *got off the stage and crept and crawled around the audience*. He imitated a bird, a snake and a human being ... [my emphasis] (Porter, 1977, p.6).

Catherine Ugwu has written in her paper, ‘Keep on running – the politics of black British performance’, that in black diasporic theatre, the audience is ‘central’ and ‘artist interventions’ (such as engaging with and moving freely among, the audience) provide ‘space’ for audience interaction and political reflection (1995, p.64).

Community participation was, then, of paramount importance to the Black Theatre of Brixton.

Realising that Longfield Hall's somewhat peripheral location had posed a problem for the Dark and Light in terms of community access and involvement, Ali planned for a 'series of Sunday afternoon shows' to take place in local parks (Bryden, 1972, p.261; Beaton, 1986, p.171). This decision was commensurate with Ali's stated belief that what he termed as 'radical black theatre' had its roots firmly in street theatre and should not be dependent on preordained theatrical spaces, 'the important thing was to bring theatre *to* the community' (Ali, 2012). In addition to the 'afternoon shows' (and performances at Longfield Hall that would run parallel to them), Ali, Beaton and Collins planned a first season of five plays for the Black Theatre of Brixton which would include 'a revival of *Play Mas* by Mustapha Matura, *Jumbie Street March* by T. Bone Wilson' and Ali's own play, *Dark Days, Light Nights* (Beaton, 1986, p. 171; Ali, 2012). *Dark Days, Light Nights* would subsequently be adapted for the film *Black Joy* (1977) and will be discussed in detail in part 3.3.

Ali was also keen that like RAPP, the Black Theatre of Brixton would tour with their productions (Ali, 2012). The fact that the Dark and Light had previously undertaken a programme of tours meant that the Black Theatre of Brixton already had contacts with several 'provincial venues' who wrote letters 'asking to see more productions' (Beaton, 1986, 171). As had been the case with RAPP, Ali thought that it was important that the theatre's radical political message would spread beyond London

and the immediate black community. He argued that a key role for the black dramatist was to educate and inform (Ali, 2012):

All we wanted was to get the show on the road. We could get it out because we wanted to talk to people. And our people means not only black people, most prominently we want to speak to white people. Some of it might have come out kind of angry, but [then] so were other writers (Ali, 2012).

Ali, Beaton and Collins estimated that the overall cost of the Black Theatre of Brixton's first season would be £40, 000 (Beaton, 1986, p.171). However, obtaining external funding for the Black Theatre of Brixton's ambitious plans proved problematic (Beaton, 1986, p.171).

Early in 1975, when Ali, Beaton and Collins were trying to find money to finance their theatre, a researcher, Naseem Khan was gathering evidence about the cultural and financial position of 'Ethnic Minority Arts' in Britain for the Arts Council, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Community Relations Commission (Owusu, 1986, p.47). Although the resultant report, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, was not without critics (not least for Khan's insistence that objectivity could only be achieved if data was obtained by a lone researcher rather than a team), it nevertheless helped to highlight the systematic marginalisation of black cultural activity during the mid-1970s (Owusu, 1986, pp. 47-48). Citing 'inadequate media interest, a low level of public patronage and publicity, as well as state under-funding and a lack of coherent policies', the report provided a damning indictment of societal and institutional attitudes towards 'minority' black arts in Britain (Owusu, 1986, p.48).

Many of the Black Theatre of Brixton's experiences (and RAPP's before it) mirrored Khan's findings. For example, whilst the Arts Council kept to their promise of

providing £1,200 to fund Ali's theatre in the parks project, Lambeth Council, who had pledged to match any sum given by the Arts Council reneged on the deal on the eve of the first performance (Beaton, 1986, pp. 171-172). The much-reduced sum that Lambeth Council eventually provided meant that nine performances, replete with 'a steel band, an African percussion group' and eleven of the Black Theatre of Brixton's actors, had budgets of under £200 each (Beaton, 1986, p. 172). The Black Theatre of Brixton found itself with a serious pecuniary shortfall and the adventurous plans for its initial season had to be heavily diluted (Chambers, 2011, p.144). In his autobiography, *Beaton but Unbowed*, Norman Beaton recalled that he and Jamal Ali were so angered by Lambeth Council's shabby treatment of the Black Theatre of Brixton that they made the content of the one of their outdoor performances much more provocative and radical than they had initially intended:

Jamal read two of his more trenchant works employing evocative words like 'blood' and 'dread', also such euphemisms as 'honky' and 'pigs'. I dusted off my copy of [James] Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man* and read the section in which the lynching, castration and burning of a black man is described in graphic, gory detail (Beaton, 1986, p.172).

Beaton has claimed that when Lambeth Council heard about this particular event, their direct response was to force the Black Theatre of Brixton to vacate Longfield Hall (Beaton, 1986, p.172). Whilst it has not been possible to verify this with archival data from Lambeth Council, in interview, Ali gave a similar account to that of Beaton (Ali, 2008). It would therefore seem that Lambeth Council, rather than recognising the community benefits of the Black Theatre of Brixton, regarded a radical black theatre company as a thorn in its side and sought to extricate itself from further involvement (Ali, 2008). Although Longfield Hall had originally been a church hall and its unusual round shape and somewhat cramped interior imposed 'some limitations on [the theatre's] production and management team', it had nevertheless provided a useful base for the Black Theatre of Brixton (Bryden, 1972,

p.261). Ali especially, had made a concerted effort to put Longfield Hall 'on the map' for Brixton's black population by dint of community outreach work; as a 'home' to radical black cultural activity it had huge symbolic importance. At a time when, as Ali asserted in interview, black theatre was ignored or 'pushed to the fringe', the impact of a black theatre company with its own premises in the heart of the black community cannot be overestimated (Ali, 2012).

Ali and Beaton were not willing to let Longfield Hall go without a fight. They reported Lambeth Council to the Race Relations Board on the grounds of racial discrimination and evidently presented a compelling case to the Board's inspector (Beaton, 1986, p.172). Alarmed by this turn of events, Lambeth Council agreed to let Longfield Hall to the Black Theatre of Brixton again and Beaton and Ali duly withdrew their complaint to the Race Relations Board (Beaton, 1986, p. 172).

However, a few months later, Lambeth Council once more ended the Black Theatre of Brixton's lease and this time it was a permanent decision (Strick, 1977, p.6).

Emphasising the importance of the theatre to Brixton's community, a contemporaneous report in the *South London Press* newspaper mooted that the empty Classic Cinema in the heart of Brixton (later re-opened as the Ritzy cinema) could provide a new home for the Black Theatre of Brixton (Strick, 1977, p.6).

Perhaps due to the fact that, like Longfield Hall, the cinema building was also owned by Lambeth Council, the plan did not come to fruition and from October 1975, the Black Theatre of Brixton remained without a base.

Determined to continue their work, Ali, Beaton and Collins wryly added 'in Exile' to the end of the theatre's name and in November 1975 they hired the Roundhouse and

staged *Black Explosion*, a week-long programme of ‘mime, music, dance, poetry and drama’ (Beaton, 1986, p.173). However, considerable sacrifices were made in order to maintain the company. Now that the Black Theatre of Brixton was without a permanent home, Jamal Ali was forced to abandon the community programmes that had been integral to the theatre’s initial formation (Beaton, 1986, p.173). Moreover, serious under-funding allied to a lack of premises meant that the theatre was forced to ‘survive on a project-by-project basis in whichever venue they could find’ (Chambers, 2011, p.144). The Black Theatre of Brixton staged plays in the Soho Poly, the Roundhouse, the ICA, Battersea Arts Centre and the Young Vic (Beaton, 1986, p.173; Chambers 2011, p.144). A direct impact of this was that the theatre became increasingly geographically divorced from the Brixton community, something that Peter Strick, writing for the *South London Press* newspaper, noted in March 1977:

It is ironical that one of the best productions yet mounted by the Black Theatre of Brixton may not be seen in the town which inspired it. The work concerned is *Jericho* [written and directed by Jamal Ali], billed as the world’s first reggae opera, which had its premiere at Battersea Arts Centre (1977, p.6).

The Black Theatre of Brixton’s financial and practical difficulties continued. In 1976, Rufus Collins left to join Keskidee, and Norman Beaton’s numerous acting commitments on stage, film and television meant that he too, became less involved with the company (Chambers, 2011, p.144). The bulk of the responsibility for the daily running and administration of the theatre therefore fell to Ali, placing him under considerable pressure (Ali, 2008). In interview, Ali recalled that the theatre was by now so under-resourced that he was forced to make compromises (Ali, 2008). A West End director, Peter Cole, expressed an interest in taking *Jericho* to The Young Vic but he insisted on using a different cast. Ali felt that he had little

choice but to acquiesce; a decision that understandably caused serious resentment among the Black Theatre of Brixton's regular actors and was cited by Ali as being a key factor in the eventual demise of the company (Ali, 2008). For Ali, the final nail in the coffin was the decision to stage Jimi Rand's *Seduced* at the Young Vic (Ali, 2008). This choice was driven by the need to present a crowd-pleasing play that would be financially lucrative; as such it had little connection with the theatre's radical agenda (Ali, 2008). Although Norman Beaton (who directed the play) went on to argue in *Beaton but Unbowed* that *Seduced* 'was an honourable attempt by one of our most experienced writers to present the conflict from another perspective', others, including Ali, saw little evidence of this in what was effectively a frivolous sex-comedy (Beaton, 1986, p.174). As Ali later commented in interview:

Seduced. That play was a disaster [laughs]. Because it was nothing like what the Black Theatre were doing. I mean the play *Seduced* now ... well, the name speaks for itself ... Anyway, [that] played and I get quite a large bit of hassle (Ali, 2008).

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties faced by the Black Theatre of Brixton, its achievements were remarkable and ground-breaking. As Michael McMillan has written in his paper 'Rebaptizing the World in Our Own Terms', by the time the Black Theatre of Brixton was finally dissolved in March 1978, it (together with Temba Theatre Company), had been responsible for producing 'more black plays than the whole of English theatre had in the previous twenty-five [years]' (2006, p.50). Norman Beaton listed its productions as including among others: Jamal Ali's *Twisted Knot*, *Dark Days Light Nights*, *Jericho* and *The Treatment*, T-Bone Wilson's *Jumbie Street March*, Steve Wilmer's *Jolly Green Soldier*, Aubrey Legal Miller's *Father Forgive Them* and *Seduced* by Jimi Rand (1986, p.173).

Conclusion

In interview, when asked how he would sum up his theatrical oeuvre, Jamal Ali referred to a line that he described as RAPP's unofficial manifesto: 'Poetry, words, music and body movement should be used as a *weapon* to further the cause of humanity' [my emphasis] (Ali, 2012). This neatly encapsulates the way in which Ali's essentially political theatre mixed Brechtian notions of dramaturgy with African traditions of orature. As Stuart Hall has written, 'the diaspora experience ... is defined ... by a conception of 'identity' which lives through, not despite difference; by hybridity' (1994, p.402). Hybridity both in content *and* form is a key trope in Ali's play-writing and his theatrical practice. A central theme in both Ali's poetry and his plays is the diasporic search for home. 'But where on earth is home?' the young black man asks his friend in *Black Feet in the Snow* (1972). In his poem, *On Trial*, Ali laments, 'Roaming roaming ten years/ Just searching for a home'. Even when home *is* found, it is problematic and unstable, as in Ali's poem, *The Breakdown* (1973), 'From the concrete shanties/Brixton erupts'. In *Jericho* (1977), Ali's 'reggae opera', 'the only way out of [Brixton's] ghetto is through alcohol, prostitution, dope, gambling, madness and despair' (Riley, 1977, p.6). These examples echo Stuart Hall's summary of the black diasporic experience as 'a narrative of displacement' (1994, p.402).

Much of Ali's theatrical work and poetry is an absent presence of which only occasional traces remain. Ali's stated aim that his work should be a 'weapon' that would 'tell it like it is to the powers that be' meant that he sacrificed artistic posterity

for political immediacy (Ali, 2012). For Ali, physically getting the political message ‘out there’ was far more important than publishing ‘we had to get the show on the road’ (Ali, 2012). Moreover, the fact that many of the performances took place ‘on the streets’ or ‘in the parks’ meant that they were by their very nature ephemeral and therefore largely unrecorded (Ali, 2012). Only two scripts (for *Black Feet in the Snow* and *Slipping into Darkness*) and a couple of poems survive. The long-term consequence of this is that although in the period 1972-75 Ali wrote and had more plays staged than Mustapha Matura and Michael Abbensetts, he has largely been neglected by historians (with the notable exception of Colin Chambers) and was overlooked by The National Theatre in their recent retrospective of ‘lost’ black British plays. Perhaps Ali’s artistic practice can be seen to metaphorically echo the diasporic experience; viable space is created for the duration of the performance only and ‘home’ is precarious and threatened. A key paradox in Ali’s dramaturgy is that on one hand his agitprop style of theatre would seem to embrace rootlessness, but on the other there was the desire to have a strong physical base in the community (as with Longfield Hall). Undoubtedly there was a strong element of pragmatism on Ali’s part, largely necessitated by what Owusu has called ‘a chronic history of under-funding’ for black theatre in the 1970s (1986, p.89). Nevertheless, Ali recalls this period as a time when politically at least, he ‘didn’t compromise’: ‘Our theatre was a revolution, it was a radical theatre and that’s why a lot of people didn’t like it because we used to talk real’ (Ali, 2012). The following section uses the case study of *Black Feet in the Snow* to explore the way in which Ali’s voice, emergent in poetry and honed in theatre, was transformed and adapted via the aesthetics of television.

3.2 – From Stage to Television: *Black Feet in the Snow*

Introduction

In his writing about diaspora, the cultural anthropologist James Clifford has stated that he is ‘concerned with diverse practices of crossing, tactics of translation [and] experiences of double or multiple attachment’ (1997, p.6). To a large extent, Clifford’s notions of diasporic crossing[s], attachment[s] and translation[s] can be seen to underpin this chapter. Clifford’s ideas are relevant on three levels. Firstly, they resonate with the themes of migration in *Black Feet in the Snow*, secondly they appertain to experiences of Jamal Ali and the play’s Brixton cast and audiences, and thirdly they correspond with the practices of adaptation from one medium to another.

Black Feet in the Snow began its life as a stage play with RAPP, a group who were, as we have seen, firmly rooted in Brixton’s black community. However, Clifford’s ideas of ‘crossing[s]’ and ‘multiple attachment[s]’ are pertinent in terms of diasporic identities, both as articulated in the play itself and in the wider lived experiences of its writer, actors and audiences. *Black Feet in the Snow* is concerned with black migration from Guyana to London and, in interview, Jamal Ali was candid about the biographical nature of the play, both in terms of his own experiences and those of RAPP. As such, Shango Baku in his performance as Jahn-Jahn, the play’s central figure, acts out a diasporic ‘double consciousness’- one which is constantly seeking ‘home’. However, a diasporic hybridity is also apparent in *Black Feet in the Snow*’s innovative structure, which draws on African and Caribbean traditions of orature and

Brechtian aspects of dramaturgy. Crossings and multiple attachments are, then, built into the very fabric of the play.

Black Feet in the Snow's adaptation for television can be looked at in terms of what Clifford has called the 'tactics of translation'. However welcome access to a wider television audience was to Jamal Ali and RAPP, the adaptation of *Black Feet in the Snow* arguably necessitated the displacement of a particular 'voice' away from its community context on the stage, to the very different medium of television.

Translation, then, can be seen in cultural terms *and* in the adaptation from one medium to another - a process that is institutionally mediated. Ultimately, this section investigates the ways in which *Black Feet in the Snow*'s cross-media translation affected a politically-committed black cultural production.

The Text

Black Feet in the Snow is a rare example of one of Ali's plays for which the script survives. It is the version which was used in the BBC *Open Door* production of the play (and is held in the BBC Written Archives at Caversham). Over sixteen scenes which meld acting, poetry, narration, music and dance, *Black Feet in the Snow* tells the story of Jahn-Jahn, a 'country boy' from Guyana who migrates to Brixton in the early 1960s. Although only the television script remains, in interview Ali was at pains to state that the text of the play *itself* was unchanged from the stage version (Ali, 2008). However, as I will later go on to argue, the aesthetics of television allowed for the significant enhancement of the Brechtian staging which characterised the original production. Indeed, the television production was not simply a filmed version of the stage play; it included location work, archive film footage and scenes

played out in a studio with designed sets. The stage play, by contrast, was always kept deliberately minimal in terms of props and scenery (Ali, 2012). Nevertheless, according to Ali, there were no changes to the dialogue in *Black Feet in the Snow* when it transferred to television from the stage and the number and order of the scenes remained the same (Ali, 2012). As I will go on to demonstrate, the theatrical version was performed variously as a full ensemble piece and as a production with a very small cast. Staging the play with a small cast necessitated the loss of the dancers, and the musicians were replaced by actors who chanted the songs whilst playing small drums; Ali termed this as ‘talk-singing’ the songs (Ali, 2012).

However, none of the scenes were dropped to accommodate a smaller cast and the text of the play remained essentially the same. Of course, here it is necessary to be mindful of Peggy Phelan’s assertion that, ‘live performance in a strict ontological sense is non-reproductive’ (1993, p.146). In other words, given the corporeal nature of performance, it is impossible for any theatrical staging of a play to be identical to the one that went before it, even if it contains exactly the same cast and has the same script. This is doubly the case with live performances of Ali’s work. Due to the politically-motivated nature of his plays and their roots in street theatre and orature, Ali actively encouraged the participation of audiences (Ali, 2012). At any given stage performance of *Black Feet in the Snow* (and Ali’s other productions for that matter), there was a ‘willingness [for the performers] to step aside and let the audience take over’ (Ali, 2012). By contrast, the performances in the televised version are ‘saved, recorded, documented’ and fixed (Phelan, 1993, p.146).

Ali stated that he drew both on his own experiences as a black migrant from Guyana to Brixton and the testimonies of RAPP's members when writing *Black Feet in the Snow*:

Black Feet in the Snow had the ... resonance of black youngsters coming to this country. I mean most of us when we came to Britain were young, I was twenty, some came in their teens ... And [we were] coming to a new environment which was cold and damp ... Every place was dark ... [and] very hostile (Ali, 2008).

In a 1974 interview, he argued that the key aim of *Black Feet in the Snow* was to demonstrate, using 'a group of musicians, dancers and actors' that 'Britain, our promised land, offered only frustration and rejection to West Indians' (Ali cited in Lennon, 1974, p.). The action of the play is centred around the (initially) polite, innocent and mild-mannered Jahn-Jahn. The play commences with a buoyant and optimistic Jahn-Jahn saying goodbye to his mother in Guyana, as he plans to begin a new life in Britain. Jahn-Jahn's mother cries loudly and falls to her knees as her son walks away from her. 'We are', she laments, 'an exile race' (Ali, 1974, p.13). It is winter when Jahn-Jahn arrives in London and he is shocked by the cold bleakness of the city. This is underlined in a song in an early scene which contains the lines 'Black feet in the snow/walking around with nowhere to go' (Ali, 1974, p.19). Soon Jahn-Jahn finds that the Aunt that he has planned to stay with has died. Jahn-Jahn is forced to traipse the streets, knocking on doors in the hope that he can find lodgings. He is constantly turned away, and in scene seven, two Teddy-boys shout racist abuse at him and kick him to the ground. He is finally rescued by a couple of young black men who take him to a dilapidated house where he is told that he can rent a room. Jahn-Jahn faces only rejection when he tries to find employment and, needing to pay rent to his highly unsympathetic black landlady, decides to claim dole money. In scene nine, Jahn-Jahn is treated with contempt by the staff in the dole office and his

feelings of alienation and anger erupt as he is endlessly sent from one official to another:

JAHN-JAHN: Me go here, me come back, three times an hour /because me never had the power/me very angry (Ali, 1974, p. 31).

Even when Jahn-Jahn finally manages to claim some dole money, it is such a derisory sum that he is unable to pay his rent. He is evicted from his room and his few meagre belongings are thrown out onto the pavement by his landlady. A dejected and humiliated Jahn-Jahn sits on his cardboard suitcase, places his head in his hands and weeps:

JAHN-JAHN: But yu si mi crosses: no job, no money, no place to live/ Eviction, persecution, brutalisation/ This street got plenty sorrow (Ali, 1974, p.40).

By scene ten, London, for Jahn-Jahn, has become a ‘crazy, stinking violent ghetto ... a colony of white contraptions’ (Ali, 1974, p.40). Jamal Ali stated in interview that it is at this point in the play that the full realisation comes to Jahn-Jahn that he is utterly powerless in the face of ‘white institutions’ (Ali, 2008). As Ali asserted, ‘it was a power trip, even though it was minions who were standing behind the counter [in the dole office or the housing office], they had the power to eclipse you, to run you all over the place’ (Ali, 2008).

Later, as he aimlessly walks the streets, Jahn-Jahn encounters a white prostitute who calls out to him, ‘Hey mister, you fancy a bit?’ When the innocent Jahn-Jahn replies quietly that he has no money, the woman gently takes him by the arm and leads him away saying, ‘It’s alright, we don’t always do it for the money you know. Come on love, it’s back this way’. The scene ends with Jahn-Jahn walking away with the

woman, largely because she is one of the few people to have shown him any human kindness since his arrival in London.

Whilst Jahn-Jahn finds momentary escape from the cold and rejection with a prostitute, some of his peers are seen contemplating more permanent solutions. In scene twelve, two men (played by Archie Pool and Emil Wilson) loiter together. Such is the desperation of one of the men, that it becomes clear that he is willing to risk what little money he has in order to get 'back home':

FIRST BETTING MAN: Well, bhoy, de horse came to mi in mi dream last night./Look na, de thing is 33 to 1./If we put the £30 on it we guw get back, (COUNTS) about £1,000, enough to take us back home./ How about it partner? (Ali, 1974, p.45).

Although the man is ultimately persuaded by his friend that this is a risky and futile plan, the idea of a return to home is further explored when they are joined by two other young men. One of the men announces that they are on their way to catch a train to begin their journey home, 'we have stayed here too long' (Ali, 1974, p. 47). However, his friend asks, 'But before I go I want to know, Where on earth is home?'

Scene thirteen is made up of dancing and narration. The narrator uses the scene to look back into history and to contemplate the legacy of slavery. He states ruefully that what followed later was a kind of con-trick; black people came to Britain willingly, only to find that, 'the civility of their host [had] broke down' and they were still treated as second-class citizens (Ali, 1974, p.50). The scene ends with the narrator bringing the play's action forward to a decade after Jahn-Jahn's arrival in London:

Ten years later and the pressure is as heavy as ever. Neither man nor Gawd eased up the pressure on this exiled man ... ten years later this exile man Jahn-Jahn (Ali, 1974, p.53).

In 1974, Jamal Ali summed up Jahn-Jahn's journey in *Black Feet in the Snow* as 'passing from mute acceptance to militant resistance' (Ali, cited in Lennon, 1974, p.). Certainly, when we encounter Jahn-Jahn again in scene fourteen, his experiences in a hostile London have radicalised him and rendered him almost unrecognisable from his earlier meek self. He is with a group of friends (and the narrator) at a Black Power stall and it is obvious that he has become a self-styled political leader: 'Tonight we talk. Tomorrow we protest./The next day, well, we'll see./the heat of this rass place is going to rebound!' (Ali, 1974, p.54). By the penultimate scene, Jahn-Jahn is the angry and charismatic firebrand who leads his friends in a protest that eventually sparks a riot:

JAHN-JAHN: We'll take on the oppressors now.

FRIENDS: Now, right now, Jahn-Jahn, right now! (Ali, 1974, p.66).

In the final scene of *Black Feet in the Snow*, the dancers sway slowly to song called 'Yesterday's Morning'. The lyrics (written by Jamal Ali), provide an epilogue, but one which does not give the audience a neat resolution to the events of the play. Although Jahn-Jahn has led his community into a riot, this is not regarded as a triumphant or even a successful act. The song calls for peace - 'Hush now people' - but at the same time argues that the situation is quite hopeless: 'no hope any more' (Ali, 1974, p.67). 'The wars are raging', warns the song, 'between the whites and the blacks/and the rest of humanity'. Whilst the singer opines that, 'I hope that all wars will die', the audience is ultimately left with the final line in the song: 'No hopes any more' (Ali, 1974, p.68).

Black Feet in the Snow, Orature and Brechtian Dramaturgy

It is notable that James Clifford's notions of diasporic 'crossings and multiple attachments' are evident both in the story of the placeless migrant Jahn-Jahn and in the form of the play itself. Whilst spatially located mainly in London, *Black Feet in the Snow's* seamless blend of various performing art forms and significant aspects of the play's structure owe much to the African and Caribbean tradition of orature.

Ngũgĩ Wa' Thiong'o explains that 'orature' is a term used to describe complex non-western performances based on oral storytelling (2007, p.1). As Thiong'o argues, whereas the phrase 'oral literature tradition' has sometimes been used in a pejorative sense to imply that such forms are 'inferior' to a western written tradition, the term 'orature' foregrounds the sophistication and complexity of African and Caribbean artistic expression (2007, p.1). It is, of course, important to realise that orature varies according to specific geographical locations and cultural and historical contexts (Thiong'o, 2007, p.3). Nevertheless, it can be argued that all forms of orature share four common (interrelated) characteristics which I will now go on to briefly highlight. Firstly, Kwesi Owusu asserts that orature has a 'unity of art forms' at its heart (1986, p.139). Thiong'o expands on this and describes the way in which orature is characterised by a non-hierarchical 'fluidity between drama, song, story, discourse and performance' (2007, p.1). Secondly, the inherently holistic nature of orature (Thiong'o terms this as orature's 'wholeness') means that there is little demarcation between the artistic and political spheres (Thiong'o, 2007, p.1). In his influential essay, 'Orature – A Self Portrait', the South African artist Pitika Ntuli explains that: 'Orature is more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life' (1988, p.215). As Ntuli argues, orature's 'total view of life' always has some political dimension (Ntuli, 1988, p.218). Thirdly,

orature has a ‘creative dialogue’ which is strongly based on patterns of ‘call and response’, which again, have a firm political basis (Owusu, 1986, p. 139). Call and response can take many forms in orature. Some examples include: a dancer’s corporeal response to the beat of a drum, the ‘reply’ to a lead singer by a collective chorus, or a group’s embellishment of a story-teller’s tale (Owusu, 1986, pp.139-140). Fourthly, orature is a community enterprise in which the performer/spectator dichotomy is often heavily blurred (Ntuli, 1988, pp.214-215). To a greater or lesser extent, all of these characteristics are evident in *Black Feet in the Snow*.

As I have already outlined in part 3.1, Jamal Ali’s childhood in Guyana had a strong influence on his voice as a writer. In interview, Ali talked about the important role that orature played in the community life of his Guyanese village. He described the way in which performances that he witnessed as a youth ‘came from an oral kind of theatre, an oral storytelling [tradition]’ (Ali, 2012). Ali recalled that group storytelling was the most popular form of entertainment during his childhood. Members of his family and friends would ‘sit on the forecourt’ in the ‘moonlight’ and ‘tell stories of all kinds’ (Ali, 2012). Sometimes music and singing formed an integral part of these performances. As a child, Ali was particularly fascinated by the way in which, as the tales were told, others would ‘jump in’ and ‘add more things’ to make the story even ‘more vibrant’ (Ali, 2012). This ‘call and response’ aspect of the performance allowed for a reworking of ‘the folktales of Guyana’ which further enhanced their often horrific, exciting and supernatural content (Ali, 2012). These were, Ali laughingly explained: ‘Stories that would frighten the hell out of you!’ (Ali, 2012).

However, the embellishments of members of the group also seemingly allowed for a socio-political meta-dialogue to take place within the storytelling. As Jacob Ross has written, the group telling of folktales helps to: ‘define the relationship between the collective and those ... [who] govern ... they also serve as a channel of communication, a political forum’ (1988, p.234). It is worth noting at this point, that Guyana witnessed huge political and social changes throughout Jamal Ali’s childhood. From the late 1940s, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), under the leadership of the Marxist, Cheddi Jagan, fought for ‘an end to colonialism, a demand for self-government and a higher standard of living for all’ (Beaton, 1986, p.44). After much struggle, the Guyanese constitution was amended in 1953 (when Jamal Ali was eleven), to allow for ‘universal adult suffrage at the age of twenty-one’ (Beaton, 1986, p.44). Norman Beaton has described the resultant ‘carnival atmosphere’ that overtook Guyana when the PPP ‘swept the polls’ in the general election of the same year (although full independence from the United Kingdom would not be achieved until 1966) (Beaton, 1986, p.44). For Ali’s family and friends, the re-telling of folktales perhaps allowed them a ‘space’ in which to explore their own experiences and feelings during this turbulent period – ‘[they talked about] how they survive[d], how they lived’ (Ali, 2012).

In both the stage productions and the televised version of *Black Feet in the Snow*, patterns of ‘call and response’ manifest themselves in terms of the dancers’ (often semi-improvised) responses to the music in the play, and in some of the spoken dialogue. One such example of dialogue based on ‘call and response’ can be seen in scene fifteen when Jahn-Jahn’s friends gather round him at the Black Power stall.

Ali sets the scene up in such a way that Jahn-Jahn is placed in the role of ‘leader’ and his friends form a collective ‘chorus’:

JAHN-JAHN: We have been marching all day long.

FRIENDS: All day long Jahn-Jahn.

JAHN-JAHN: And what have we accomplished? Nothing!

FRIENDS: Not a thing Jahn-Jahn. (Ali, 1974, p.65).

This structure serves not only to foreground Jahn-Jahn as an emergent political leader, but also to allow the audience a ‘gap’ in which to consider their own reactions to Jahn-Jahn’s words. Related to this point is the way in which the *stage production* allowed for the possibility of a further element of ‘call and response’ – that of audience participation. As I have outlined earlier, Ali encouraged interventions from the audience. As he stated in interview:

I’m [talking about] audience participation ... We did that kind of theatre where you had *carte blanche* ... anybody can get involved and intervene into the theatre. I think *that* is fantastic. We’d [do] the play and someone would say ‘that line is not so’ ... I’d say, ‘Go on, take the stage’ (Ali, 2012).

What is interesting here is the way in which Ali positively welcomes a critical response from an audience member and allows it to become part of the play: ‘Go on, take the stage’. Again, this is firmly in keeping with characteristics of orature. As Kwesi Owusu has argued, orature blurs the boundaries between performer and audience and in this in turn, facilitates a two-way dialogue which is punctuated by ‘frequent contradictions’ which are generally of a political nature (1986, p.140). As these examples illustrate (and Ali himself readily acknowledged in interview) *Black Feet in the Snow*, then, has explicit connections with orature (Ali, 2012).

However, as I will go on to demonstrate below, *Black Feet in the Snow* also incorporates elements of staging which promote a Brechtian interpretation of the

text. Of course, some care needs to be taken here. In their discussion of the plays of the radical Nigerian novelist and playwright Femi Osofisan (1946-), Olu Obafemi and Abdullahi Abubakar make the important point that there are both ‘corresponding and coincidental’ intersections between Brechtian dramaturgy and Caribbean and ‘African folk performance in the areas of audience participation, style of acting and the use of music and songs’ (2006, p.153). Given this, they censure what they term as the ‘uncritical wholesale attribution of [African and Caribbean] ... dramaturgical aesthetics to Brechtian epic [theatre]’ (2006, p.153). Nevertheless, in the case of Osofisan, they are also critical of reductive readings of his plays which deny the existence of Brechtian elements and engage only with African and Caribbean ‘folklorist’ explanations (2006, p.153). As Obafemi and Abubakar assert, ‘Osofisan’s approach could be said to be a fusion of African thought-structures and foreign forms’ (2006, p.153). Their reading of Osofisan’s work, then, foregrounds its diasporic hybridity whilst remaining necessarily cautious of monolithic Brechtian interpretations (Obafemi and Abubakar, 2006, p.165). Mindful of these ideas, I now turn to the staging of *Black Feet in the Snow*.

Staging *Black Feet in the Snow*

In addition to writing *Black Feet in the Snow*, Jamal Ali directed the stage productions of the play and performed the part of the narrator. As such, the work represented a significant development of his authorial voice. As RAPP did not have a permanent base, the initial rehearsals took place, over a period of several months, at the Black People’s Information Centre in Ladbroke Grove. As I have noted in part 3.1, Ladbroke Grove at this time housed the headquarters of various Black Power affiliated groups. In this way, Ali’s choice of venue can be seen as instructive

insofar as it locates performance and practice firmly in what was a geographical site of radical black political activity. It is again notable that when *Black Feet in the Snow* was adapted for television, Ladbroke Grove was used as a key location.

As outlined above, the young non-professional actors who formed RAPP were predominantly drawn from the Brixton community. The fact that RAPP's members had little or no previous acting experience posed a challenge for Ali, but it also afforded him considerable agency as a director. RAPP were 'from and of' the community and Ali argued that this enabled them to have an inherent understanding of the rhythm of the language, gesture and corporeality necessary to what he termed as 'authentic black performance' (Ali, 2012). Shango Baku, in particular, was someone Ali later described as 'a natural actor' whose experiences 'on the street' allowed him to give the raw expansive and nuanced performance necessary to depict Jahn-Jahn's journey from quiet desperation to militant resistance (Ali, 2012).

The stage version of *Black Feet in the Snow* opened at the Commonwealth Institute in 1972. From the date of its relocation to a modernist 'concrete tent' building in Kensington in 1962, the Commonwealth Institute had encouraged the staging of 'multiracial productions' (Chambers, 2011, p.124; Heathcote, 2012). During the 1970s it came to be widely regarded as a venue that was highly supportive of black theatre groups. Among numerous other black plays, the Commonwealth Institute staged Drum's productions of Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* and *How Do You Clean a Sunflower?*, the latter being a controversial work written by the West Indian Drama Group and directed by Horace Ové (Chambers, 2011, p.152).

Black Feet in the Snow played for two nights at the Commonwealth Institute (July 29-30 1972). It featured the same RAPP members later used in the television production. The line-up consisted of ten non-professional actors, including Shango Baku, Archie Pool and Emil Wilson, all of whom would go on to work on further film and television projects during the 1970s. Jamal Ali acted the part of the narrator both in the stage and television versions. In addition to RAPP, he used 'Shades of Black', an ensemble of five dancers, choreographed by Jeanette Springer (Ali, 2012). 'Shades of Black' would also later feature in the television production. This same cast then went on to perform *Black Feet in the Snow* at the then newly-opened Keskidee Centre in Islington (Ali, 2012: Chambers, 2011, p.146). The Keskidee was one of London's first 'black-led arts centres' and has been described as 'a major platform for African and Caribbean culture' (Chambers, 2011, p.146). From the outset, the Keskidee had a strong political ethos; its name, taken from a Guyanese bird, served as a 'reminder and symbol of both Caribbean roots and migration' (Chambers, 2011, p.146). As had been the case with the rehearsal space, both the Commonwealth Institute and the Keskidee provided Ali and RAPP with safe and receptive venues in which to perform.

For a further six months, RAPP toured *Black Feet in the Snow* sporadically in London, although with a much pared down cast, playing in what Ali later described as 'a series of little dives ... wherever we could get an audience' (Ali, 2012). He felt that this was firmly in line with RAPP's radicalism. In interview, Ali stated that what he termed as 'radical black theatre' had its roots firmly in street theatre and should not be dependent on preordained theatrical spaces, 'the important thing was to bring theatre to the community' (Ali, 2012). Wendy Walters has written that: 'authorship allows ...[diasporic] writers to construct a *diaspora space* [original

emphasis]’ (2005, p.ix). For Walters, this *diaspora space* is ultimately ‘more habitable’ than ‘the spaces of exclusion’ often encountered in the ‘host’ country (Walters, 2005, p.ix). I would suggest that a *diaspora space* was constructed within *Black Feet in the Snow*’s text, in the performance of the play, and by its black audiences.

Brechtian aspects of dramaturgy and *Black Feet in the Snow*

Even when RAPP performed *Black Feet in the Snow* as a full ensemble piece (as they did at The Commonwealth Institute and the Keskidee Centre) Ali insisted that the stage should be ‘bare’ and that only props deemed to be utterly essential to the performance (such as the white masks held by the actors in scene five) should be used (Ali, 2012). Whilst in part this was due to pecuniary constraints, of much greater importance to Jamal Ali was his ideological notion that black theatre should be radical, not only in terms of its political content but its form. He rejected the idea that there should be a physical and metaphorical distance between actors and audience: ‘we always did theatre *with* the audience’ (Ali, 2012). Ali argued that proscenium arch theatre, with what he termed as its ‘attendant paraphernalia’, only served to distance the audience from the essential message that was being conveyed (Ali, 2012). To this end, wherever possible, RAPP performed ‘in the round’ and sought to disrupt and interrupt established theatrical conventions. This was achieved by allowing direct address from actor to audience and setting things up in such a way that an actor could spring from among the audience and walk around them,

‘declaring what [he] had to declare’ (Ali, 2012). Both of these essentially Brechtian devices were used by the narrator in stage performances of *Black Feet in the Snow*.

Of his theatrical practice, Brecht has written that ‘theatre, in a spirit of progress and experiment, [must be] directed towards [the] transformation of society’ (1964, pp. 239-240). For Brecht, theatre is the vehicle through which ‘debate’ and subsequent political change are effected (Turner and Behrndt, 2008, p.39). One of Brecht’s dramaturgical devices was to create a ‘critical distance for the narrator’ (Turner and Behrndt, 2008, p.51). This strategy enabled the narrator to ‘step aside’ from the action and to comment on the context, and meant, importantly, that the audience ‘was no longer in any way allowed to submit to a [theatrical] experience uncritically’ (Brecht, 1964, p.71). Such disruptions provide a demonstration to the audience that ‘the course of history, like the course of a scene in a play, *can* be changed as a result of human intervention’ (Holland, 2012, p.80). As Ali explained, the asides of the narrator in *Black Feet in the Snow*, included the audience more fully and handed them political responsibility, ‘I was not interested in a passive audience’ (Ali, 2012). Ali’s use of the narrator to incite the audience to political action can, then, be read as highly Brechtian. An example can be seen in scene fourteen. As Jahn-Jahn rallies his friends to demonstrate about the beating of two black men ‘in them stinking station jail’, the narrator moves to the side of the stage to comment direct to the audience: ‘Protest is a sign of weakness. The assumption that timid voices parading the streets, shouting slogans will be listened to, is a fallacy’ (Ali, 1974, p.59). In this way, space is given for the audience to reflect on the Black Power notion of the usefulness of violent direct action; as Ali commented, ‘the thing about our theatre, it

was like a teaching institution' (Ali, 2012). Television adaptation, as I shall argue, served to enhance these Brechtian techniques.

The Television Production

Given *Black Feet in the Snow*'s radicalism, both in terms of form and political content, it might be expected that a television adaptation would be moderated. As I have shown in part 2.2, with the notable exceptions of *In the Beautiful Caribbean* and the series *Gangsters*, documentary realism was the dominant aesthetic mode across film and television for depicting black experience throughout the 1970s (Mercer, 1988, p.9). It is, then, a paradox that in the case of *Black Feet in the Snow*, the institutional framing of the text served not only to retain the radicalism of the stage version, but also to amplify its non-naturalistic, Brechtian elements. The reasons for this appear to lie in the exceptional 'discursive space' afforded to marginalised groups by *Open Door*.

Open Door

The community series, *Open Door* was broadcast on BBC2 from April 1973 to March 1983 (BFI Open Door). Its programmes spanned a wide range of genres from live discussions and phone-ins to documentaries and small concerts. In a press release, the BBC described the concept of the series thus: 'The idea of *Open Door* is to allow groups or communities with views that are not normally represented on air to say what they want to say in the way they want to' ('The Programmes', 1973). Interested groups were encouraged to apply to the *Open Door* Community Programme Unit for a programme slot, and Rowan Ayres, the editor of the unit, made the initial selection of the groups deemed suitable ('The Programmes', 1973). After this, his recommendations were considered by a committee, chaired by the

BBC's then-Director of Programmes, Alasdair Milne, and the final decision was made (The Programmes, 1973). Whilst there was evidently concern in some quarters that this process lacked impartiality (Newton, 2011, p.162), close scrutiny of the list of organisations appearing in the first year of the series' transmission reveals the inclusion of diverse and sometimes controversial groups. Early contributors included, 'The Transsexual Liberation group' (tx4/6/1973), a group of 'battered wives' from 'Chiswick Women's Aid' (the first refuge for sufferers of domestic violence) (tx1/10/1973) and representatives from the self-styled 'Gypsy Council' (tx3/12/1973) (BFI Open Door). This cutting edge subject matter was juxtaposed with programmes such as *How to Stop Ring Roads* (tx21/5/1973) in which a group of pedestrians from York complained about the growing number of roads in their city. Applicants were subject to certain constraints, codified by the BBC, which served to prohibit *Open Door's* contributors from airing material containing 'obscene speech', or from infringing existing 'laws affecting broadcasting' (Newton, 2011, pp. 162-163). However, key emphasis was placed on freedom of speech and expression. As Rowan Ayres said in a contemporaneous interview: '*Open Door* is the chance for different groups to have forty minutes screen time to present themselves and what they stand for ... the production team will try to become part of each group ... They'll impose on us, not we on them' ('Access to the screen', 1973, p.12).

Despite Rowan Ayres' democratic sentiments, there is evidence that others in the BBC were keen to retain (and impose) what Stuart Hall has called the institutional 'governmentality of television' (1995, p.14). As Hall has argued, at an institutional level, tight boundaries are actually placed around so-called 'open-access' programmes: '[programme-making] is powerfully mediated and transformed by the

apparatuses, the discursive strategies, organisational practices [and] professional knowledge and technologies' (1995, p.14). Certainly this can be seen in *Open Door's* rigorous selection criteria, the BBC's scheduling of episodes, and in the production process itself. *Open Door* programmes were initially aired on Monday evenings at 11.30pm, although by series three (in which *Black Feet in the Snow* was screened) a repeat took place on Sunday afternoons (Lennon, 1974, p.21). A contemporaneous press release reveals that the BBC, whilst keen to have a community strand of programming, was at the same time anxious that, 'this kind of experimental programme [would] not displace existing runs of programmes earlier in the evening' ('Misc. Timing', 1973). Moreover, *Open Door* budgets were small ('in the region of £100'), although participating groups were permitted to supplement this with their own funds ('The Programmes', 1973). A further BBC edict made it clear that professional knowledge and technological control remained firmly in the hands of the corporation:

The studio to be used will be presentation studio B ... and once the groups are in that studio then *the actual operation of all equipment and direction rests very firmly with the BBC staff* – i.e. there is no chance of *non-professionals* moving cameras round etc [my emphasis] ('The Programmes', 1973).

Nevertheless, despite, or perhaps because of, these constraints, the groups who took part in the series were afforded high levels of autonomy in deciding the 'style and content' of their particular programme ('Open Door Opens', 1973; Ali, 2008). The BBC provided as little or as much support as participants requested. As well as loaning groups a studio and cameras (and the necessary personnel required to operate them), the BBC's Community Programme Unit offered 'a small amount of location filming' ('Accompanying information' [n.a.] 1973). The BBC also made it clear that *Open Door* programmes could be enhanced by the inclusion of 'still photographs,

tape recordings, newsreel film and clips from other television programmes in post-production (‘Accompanying information’, 1973). In a 1992 television interview, Mike Bolland, who worked as producer on *Open Door* from 1973-75, intimated that the series’ non-peak scheduling and small budget allowed for a high degree of experimentation and novelty, both in content and form, which would not have been tolerated elsewhere in the BBC (Bolland, 1992). For Bolland and his team it was important that *Open Door* took sometimes ‘scary’ risks and pushed television’s boundaries, ‘even if it didn’t always come off’ (1992). This attitude is apparent in archival material about *Black Feet in the Snow* in which the *Open Door* team freely acknowledge the programme’s ‘highly controversial’ subject matter but make it clear that what they describe as a tale of ‘exile suffering and self-realisation’ needs to be shown on television (Booth, 1974). Again, this underlines the point, made throughout this thesis, that fictional forms allowed for the public airing of politically-contentious topics in the way that factual ones could not. In short, the BBC were very sensitive about documentaries concerned with race politics, but much more accommodating about drama (as was the case with *A Hole in Babylon* for example).

Open Door - Black Feet in the Snow

Early in 1974, RAPP decided to apply to *Open Door* to make a televised version of *Black Feet in the Snow*. For *Open Door*, this was a risky venture, not only due to the radical themes of the play, but also in terms of the programme’s genre. *Open Door* had not attempted such an ambitious project as a fiction play before (Booth, 1974). Moreover, *Black Feet in the Snow* was aired for an hour rather than the requisite

forty minutes of all other *Open Door* productions. Sadly there is no surviving copy of RAPP's application to the BBC. Although it is not known for certain who made the initial overture to the BBC, an internal document cites RAPP member 'Emil Wilson' as a key 'contact' for the programme (Press service, 1974, p.2). Brian Skilton was assigned by the BBC Community Programme Unit to direct *Black Feet in the Snow*. Skilton, who would later go on to work with Horace Ové on projects for Channel Four, most notably producing Caryl Phillips' *Playing Away* (1986), quickly won Ali's respect and trust (Wambu, 2005: Ali, 2012). As Ali later explained: 'Brian Skilton was part and parcel of the BBC furnishings and fittings. [He was] nothing to do with RAPP, but he was one of those white nice guys who gave RAPP a chance to air our views' (Ali, 2012).

Ali recalled that he felt 'very involved' in the television production of *Black Feet in the Snow* and that prior to filming, he 'spent a lot of time going to [Brian Skilton's] house' in order to discuss the programme (Ali, 2008). The pair worked closely and Skilton agreed that the play's script should remain the same as the stage production and that the cast should comprise the same actors, musicians and dancers who had performed at the Commonwealth Institute and the Keskidee Centre (Ali, 2012). Indeed, in interview, Ali insisted that the performances that he and the other actors gave in the television programme were actually very similar to those on the stage (Ali, 2012). One of the reasons for this was the perfunctory nature of the television rehearsals: 'All they [the BBC technicians] did was to say what you would say and they shoot after they put you in the studio and that was that. There were no proper rehearsals or anything like that' (Ali, 2008).

However, the fact that Skilton was careful not to insist on personnel changes, significant alterations to performance style or changes to the play's script meant that Ali felt that he retained a strong level of authorship and control over the project (Ali, 2008). As Ali commented in interview: 'Basically Brian [Skilton] had nothing to do with altering what we [RAPP] had to say and what we were trying to do in terms of how we were presenting *Black Feet in the Snow*' (Ali, 2012). Ali recalled that he wanted the televised version of *Black Feet in the Snow* to represent a dynamic continuum of the innovative work that he had begun on stage (Ali, 2012). To this end, he made it clear from the outset that he was happy for Skilton to 'use some technique[s] to transport the play from one level to another' (Ali, 2012). It is perhaps for this reason that Ali was ultimately receptive to Skilton's radical aesthetic vision for *Black Feet in the Snow* – one in which Brechtian formalism would strongly feature. As Ali commented in interview: 'Brian [Skilton] wanted to create a revolution with [RAPP's] *Open Door* [programme]' (Ali, 2012). In this regard, Skilton's support for Ali can be compared with Graham Benson's contribution to *A Hole in Babylon*. As such, both cases are evidence of liberal BBC support for black writers.

Ali and Skilton agreed that the televised adaptation of *Black Feet in the Snow* could not simply be a filmed version of the stage production. In interview, Ali explained that bare stages and minimal props were effective with his theatre audiences, but television audiences required what he termed as 'the authenticity', that came from dressed sets and location work (Ali, 2012). To this end, he remembered that: 'Brian [Skilton] kind of squeezed as much as he could squeeze from the BBC. We had to ...' (Ali, 2012). Unlike most groups who took part in *Open Door*, RAPP fully

utilised the technical support that was on offer. As Ali stated in interview: ‘We used everything, everything’ (Ali, 2012). *Black Feet in the Snow* therefore includes footage shot on location (in Brixton, Portobello Road, Ladbroke Grove and Hyde Park’s Speakers’ Corner), library film of ‘the West Indies’, still photographs of ‘slave trade prints’, studio sets and post-production techniques in which footage is superimposed on to the bodies of the dancers (Ali, 1974). That such an approach was hitherto unknown in an *Open Door* production is highlighted by a contemporaneous *Sunday Times* review written by Peter Lennon. *Black Feet in the Snow* was, he said, far more ‘technically ambitious and proficient’ than any previous programme in the series (Lennon, 1974, p.21).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the locations used in *Black Feet in the Snow* were deeply symbolic in terms of black political activity and struggle. A desolate Jahn-Jahn is seen wandering Brixton’s grey backstreets at the beginning of the play, later he rallies his friends at a Black Power stall in Ladbroke Grove, and finally, he leads a riot from Speaker’s Corner. Some of the play’s Brechtian elements were enhanced in the location shooting. Skilton has Jahn-Jahn speak ‘his sorrows’ direct to camera outside of a row of slum-like dwellings in Brixton’s Coldharbour Lane. Later, Jamal Ali’s omnipresent narrator appears in Ladbroke Grove as a Black Power stall-holder where he ‘steps out’ of a seemingly naturalistic scene to comment, straight to the camera, on the action. Behind him, the scene continues to ‘run on’ as if others were oblivious to the intervention. Interestingly, Ali regarded these devices as a ‘natural extension’ of the stage play. It was, he said in interview, ‘a way of engaging the television audience’ (Ali, 2012).

Black Feet in the Snow made liberal use of CSO (colour separation overlay) techniques. Broadly, CSO involves covering large areas of the studio (or actors' bodies) in blue material during filming. This colour is then 'keyed out and only the characters [or their hands and faces] and props are recorded' (Merritt, 1987, p.119). Another camera 'records a drawn caption, model, film or photograph' which will 'appear' on the 'keyed out' areas (Merritt, 1987, p.39). Initially CSO was mainly used for the backdrops for news bulletins but some television directors recognised that it could have applications in television drama (Merritt, 1987, p.39). As Merritt has pointed out, CSO was commonly used in drama when budgets were low (1987, p.39) and this factor may have contributed to its use in *Black Feet in the Snow*. However, it seems likely that Brian Skilton was predominantly drawn to CSO due to the visual creativity that the technique afforded him. CSO was known to be effective when depicting 'fantasy effects and unreal situations' and had the advantage of allowing multiple and fast 'changes of background' (Merritt, 1987, p.39). In short, CSO was ideally suited to non-naturalistic Brechtian aesthetics. According to the original *Open Door* working script of *Black Feet in the Snow*, CSO is used in five scenes. The direction notes for scene thirteen provides an illuminating example of the way in which CSO was utilised:

Four dancers in CSO blue costumes stand together to form a screen. The narrator (with CSO blue background) is superimposed ... As the narrator finishes, the dancers move. The narrator's face splits ... the dance is a torch light dance which is more or less a confused parade. During the dance the narrator's face is lost. In its place we see prints of the slave trade [on the bodies of the dancers] (Ali, 1974, pp. 50-51).

The Brechtian intention of this scene is underlined in three interconnected ways. Firstly, there is a foregrounding of the narrator. Secondly, there is a 'mixing' of acting, music, film and dance. Thirdly, the dancers are moving to a soundtrack on

which a male voice repeatedly sings, ‘freedom, freedom’ while slave trade images are superimposed onto their bodies. Here, and elsewhere in *Black Feet in the Snow*, CSO is utilised to project contradictory footage onto the bodies of the dancers and actors. It is instructive to consider Skilton’s deployment of these techniques in the light of Brecht’s writing on drama. In 1934, Brecht described his own practice thus:

We introduced music and film and turned everything top to bottom ... We had our characters bursting into song at the most uncalled for moments. In short we thoroughly muddled up people’s idea of drama ... the narrator was no longer missing ... the background adopt[ed] an attitude to the events on stage – by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said ... (Brecht, 1964, p.65, p.71).

For Brecht, it was important that drama had, what he called ‘the force of what is startling’ (1964, p.71). Contradictions and ‘muddles’ within the narrative itself, such as those described in the above extract, meant that it was impossible for audience members to be mere passive ‘spectators’ (Brecht, 1964, p.71). Theatre audiences could not simply empathise with the events in a drama, instead they were subject to ‘a process of alienation’ in which nothing was ‘obvious’ (Brecht, 1964, p.71). This ‘process of alienation’ afforded audiences the ‘space’ to both reevaluate and form their own political ideas (Brecht, 1964, p.71). The audience, then, could only achieve political enlightenment (and ultimately, political action) through a de-familiarisation of all that appeared ‘natural’ (Brecht, 1964, p.71). Skilton’s directorial approach in *Black Feet in the Snow* arguably achieves the effect outlined by Brecht. For example, in addition to the aforementioned ‘dancers and slavery’ images, in scene eight, Skilton overlaid Jahn-Jahn’s badly beaten body with library footage of optimistic Windrush arrivals. In this way, notions of emancipation, migration and racism are subverted and provide the necessary ‘space’ for the television audience to reflect on what it is to be black in Britain. As such, Skilton’s

approach can be contrasted to that of Graham Benson, whose seamless incorporation of newsreel footage served to further enhance the documentary realism of *A Hole in Babylon*. Aesthetically then, *Black Feet in the Snow* is opposite to this and can be seen as exceptional in a decade when documentary realism was the dominant form for black expression.

Taking part in *Open Door* was ultimately very beneficial for Jamal Ali and RAPP (Ali, 2012). Ali was happy with the television adaptation of *Black Feet in the Snow*, and later said that the play's central message of 'the conflict between the powerful and the powerless' was strongly retained (Ali, 2008). Moreover, he was impressed with Skilton's use of visual imagery which he felt to be sympathetic to the play and enhanced the viewing experience for television audiences:

[*Black Feet in the Snow*] was very beautiful to see. And the mix of the stuff ... Oh yes, like they [the dancers] were dancing across the sea [a superimposed image in the first scene] ... And the [film footage] of the [Windrush] Caribbean visitors of the 50s and 60s. There was some great kind of imagery there (Ali, 2012).

The *Open Door* production of *Black Feet in the Snow* received favourable reviews, most notably from the *Sunday Times* who praised it for, among other things, 'dealing honestly with a genuine problem' and for its 'effective cinematic devices' (Ali, 2012: Lennon, 1974, p.21). Responses to the programme in Ali's community were largely positive and it also provided welcome wider exposure for RAPP. In interview, Ali recalled that: '*Black Feet in the Snow* on television got us ... more [theatrical] gigs ... Oh man, I was elated!' (Ali, 2012).

Conclusion

The staging and subsequent television adaptation of *Black Feet in the Snow*, reveals much about the intersection between radical black theatre and television drama, and facilitates an examination of the nature of black creative agency. The hybrid diasporic nature of the stage play allowed for a reclaiming and re-imagining of the cultural form of orature which was seemingly overlaid with Brechtian ideas of dramaturgy. A close consideration of the institutional context indicates that *Open Door* (like the BBC's *Play for Today* strand) provided an unusual 'gap' in the BBC's production and programming schedule - one which enabled hitherto unheard black voices to come to the fore. Paradoxically, the creative collaboration between Jamal Ali and the television director, Brian Skilton, allowed for an adaptation that further enhanced the radical intention of the original stage play. At a time when, to quote Jamal Ali, 'you hardly saw black people on the stage or television', the *Open Door* production of *Black Feet in the Snow* demonstrated a radicalism of content and form. In a period when documentary realism was the dominant mode of black representation, *Black Feet in the Snow* utilised non-naturalistic techniques. To this end, the aesthetics of television emphasised the play's hybridity; devices such as CSO and location filming served to underscore both its orature-based 'mixing' of artistic forms and its Brechtian elements. The superimposing of slave narratives and Windrush imagery onto the bodies of actors and dancers, for example, allowed for a visual critique of events in black history which would not be seen again until the work of black film cooperatives such as Sankofa and Ceddo in the 1980s.

As Ali stated in interview, in terms of 'giving a voice to people who did not have a voice on television', RAPP's involvement with *Open Door* more than 'fulfilled its

purpose' (Ali, 2012). In this way, the case study of *Black Feet in the Snow* foregrounds the value of researching the production context in examining black creative agency. As has been shown, the transformation of Ali's voice from his natural medium of the stage was enabled by institutional permission and a supportive production team at the BBC. Like *A Hole in Babylon*, the case of *Black Feet in the Snow* illustrates the way in which institutional gatekeepers (usually producers) could help to both enable black cultural production *and* defend its integrity. By contrast, as I shall demonstrate in the following section, an opportunity to turn one of Ali's plays into a feature film was beset by difficulty and resulted in compromise.

3.3 – From Stage to Feature Film - *Black Joy*

Introduction

This section explores the feature film *Black Joy* for which Jamal Ali wrote the screenplay. *Black Joy* was adapted from Ali's stage play, *Dark Days, Light Nights* (1975). This second example of creative adaptation charts the transformation of Ali's voice from community-based theatre to feature film. According to Sean Burke, a key question to be asked when considering the authorship of any text is 'who is speaking?' (1995, p.285). Arguably, the question of authorship becomes further complicated and politicised when considering black creative agency. This is especially apparent when it is inextricably linked to notions of diaspora and cultural identity. James Clifford has written about the hybridizing and fuzzy nature of 'contact zones' that push against concrete or metaphorical 'borders' (1997, p.7). As Clifford argues, it is in the liminal space of the 'contact zone' where 'cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place' (1997, p.7). Here, cultural exchange is often 'violently' contested (Clifford, 1997, p.7). In other words, creative cultural exchange can be seen in both cerebral and topographical terms; to follow Clifford, it takes place at the outlying edges of society. The making, marketing and subsequent reception of *Black Joy* is imbued with the notion of 'contact zones'; complex, fragmented and conflicted meetings of the corporeal, the geographical, the technological, the political, and the imagined. Clifford's ideas then, strongly inform this section.

The Stage Play - *Dark Days, Light Nights*

Dark Days, Light Nights, was the first work that Jamal Ali wrote for the Black Theatre of Brixton (Ali, 2008). Although no script survives, it is possible to recover something of the content and tone of the original play by dint of analysis of archival material and interviews with Ali. In interview, Ali stated that, in common with *Black Feet in the Snow*, *Dark Days Light Nights* contained autobiographical elements (Ali, 2008). Like its subsequent screen adaptation, *Black Joy*, *Dark Days, Light Nights* tells the story of the ‘country boy’, Benjamin, who comes to Brixton in search of his father (Ali, 2008). Unable to find him, Benjamin falls into the predatory clutches of Dave, Brixton’s ‘King of the hustle’, who invites the younger man to share his seedy bed-sit (Ali, 2008: Porter, 1977, p.6). Dave subsequently takes it upon himself to ‘educate’ Benjamin ‘in the true ways of the world’ (Ali, 2008). Ali described Dave as a ‘Lucifer-like’ figure who delights in Benjamin’s moral corruption:

Dave was full of tricks on the streets. And it is Dave ...[who] was to teach this youngster ... that you have to hustle. [Benjamin] was a virgin and Dave had to teach him how to survive and to lose his virginity ... and to have some ganja. [Benjamin] could not cope with that, he never knew anything about those matters. So that was the foundation of the play and from there, [Dave took him to] the strip joints, the ganja joints, the shebeens ... (Ali, 2008).

Dark Days, Light Nights was billed as a comedy, but it had a strong political message at its heart (Porter, 1977, p.6). According to Ali, it was his intention that the play’s audience would never be left in any doubt that Benjamin’s picaresque trawl of Brixton’s underbelly was not of his choosing: ‘[Benjamin] preferred his innocent, nice ways that he came from Guyana with, but it soon was all gone really’ (Ali, 2008). Norman Beaton has written that in plays such as *Dark Days, Light Nights*, Ali used ‘raucous humour’ to explore the serious question as to why some

black people found themselves living on ‘the front line of the inner city’ (1986, p. 174):

[Ali’s plays explain] why they are drop outs, petty criminals and prostitutes [and] what circumstances of frustration led many of them [to this] ... His plays search for truth and an affirmation of love and racial tolerance. He achieves these ends by the emotional and societal conflicts he sets up in his plays (Beaton, 1986, p.174).

As Beaton points out, Ali often used the device of setting up conflict between his characters in order to educate audiences about issues affecting black communities (Ali, 2012). For Ali, the exploitative behaviour of Dave in *Dark Days, Light Nights*, and the questioning of his lifestyle by other characters, affords audiences a ‘space’ in which to consider their own socio-political reality: ‘I have a strategy when I write through those persons to get certain information out and to teach people what is happening in their own communities’ (Ali, 2012). To this end, in *Dark Days, Light Nights*, Dave’s brother Jomo identifies strongly with the Black Power movement and consequently challenges both Dave’s lifestyle and his treatment of Benjamin (Porter, 1977, p.6). Cedric Porter, who reviewed a 1977 production of the play in the *South London Press* newspaper, highlighted the stark differences between Dave and Jomo. The feckless Dave, Porter wrote, ‘kept his brains in his underpants and was ego-tripping on being black with an exotic white girlfriend’ (Porter, 1977, p.6). He noted that Jomo, on the other hand, was a thoughtful, disciplined and highly politicised character (Porter, 1977, p.6). Jomo was keen to teach Benjamin that, whilst Dave’s behaviour provided momentary respite from the harsh world around him, it was ultimately only through the gaining of a ‘Black Power consciousness’ that the situation of Brixton’s black communities would improve. In a similar way, *Dark Days, Light Nights* provides a powerful contrast between Benjamin’s impetuous girlfriend, Saffra, and Dave’s put-upon partner Miriam (Porter, 1977, p.6). Porter

described the way in which the hardworking but impoverished Miriam regarded the flirtatious antics of the younger woman, Saffra, with a 'slow-boiling disdain' (1977, p.6).

Norman Beaton has commented perceptively that *Dark Days, Light Nights* essentially posed the question, 'to be or not to be a black militant?' (1986, p.194). In the stage play, Benjamin's corruption in the big city may be inevitable and darkly humorous, but it is finally a harsh, morally empty, and 'brutal' experience (Ali, 2008). Moreover, the words of Jomo, the 'Black Power brother', serve as a constant reminder to Benjamin (and the audience) that black political solidarity provides a solution to the struggles of a community in the way that hustling, drug-taking and sexual promiscuity cannot (Porter, 1977, p.6). Evidently Ali was keen that this was the message that audiences would ultimately take from the play. Porter's review of *Dark Days, Light Nights* reveals that the play's final scene contained Brechtian elements of dramaturgy which served to underline the importance of black political action. Porter described the way in which some of the actors 'stepped out' of a seemingly naturalistic scene to address the audience directly: 'the spokespeople for Black Power consciousness were suddenly extracted out of their dramatic context to lay their message on the audience' (Porter, 1977, p.6). Whereas the television adaptation of *Black Feet in the Snow* further enhanced the non-naturalistic aspects of Ali's dramaturgy, this didactic element of his work would be lost when *Dark Days, Light Nights* moved from stage to screen. *Black Joy* is an uneasy amalgamation of social-realist comedy and blaxploitation; some of the reasons for this will now be examined.

Biography and Authorship: Anthony Simmons

Jamal Ali and the filmmaker Anthony Simmons first met in winter 1975, shortly after Simmons went to see a Black Theatre of Brixton performance of *Dark Days, Light Nights* in London (Ali, 2008: Anthony Simmons, personal communication, February 2, 2013). In interview, Ali recalled the way in which Simmons had sought him out at the end of the production and ‘said that he liked the play, [that he had] read the reviews and wanted to do [it as] a movie’ (Ali, 2008). Already aware of Simmons’ work, Ali was initially pleased and flattered: ‘He was an experienced man who had directed Peter Sellers in [*The Optimists of Nine Elms* (Simmons, 1973)] and *Four in the Morning* (Simmons, 1965)’ (Ali, 2008). Perhaps mindful of his earlier harmonious and fruitful partnership with Brian Skilton on the televised version of *Black Feet in the Snow*, Ali agreed that he would adapt *Dark Days, Light Nights* into a screenplay (Ali, 2008). However, from the outset it was clear that Ali and Simmons had equally personal but significantly different ideas of Brixton. One way of accounting for their distinctive authorial preoccupations is by recourse to Simmons’ biographical (and creative) background.

Anthony Simmons was from a working-class East London Jewish family and spent his formative years in the East End of the mid-1920s and 1930s (Russell, 2003, p.1). Initially trained as a lawyer, he became a filmmaker after serving in the Second World War (Simmons, 2013). Asked to name the early influences on his filmmaking, Simmons cited the American documentary short, *Muscle Beach* (Strick and Lerner, 1948) (Simmons, 2013). Directed by Joseph Strick and Irving Lerner and shot on 16mm film, *Muscle Beach* shows people at play at Venice Beach, California (Ellis, 2013, p.894). Footage of amateur athletes, people relaxing on the

sand and children paddling in the waves are juxtaposed with a soundtrack of gentle folk songs. The influence of *Muscle Beach* can clearly be seen in *Sunday by the Sea* (Simmons, 1951) which documented working-class Londoners on a day out in Southend-on-Sea. Here, Simmons eschews voiceover and instead uses traditional music hall songs to set the optimistic mood of the film. Several scenes strongly echo those in *Muscle Beach*, not least when children frolic in the sea. In interview, Simmons also stressed the importance of the Italian Neo-Realist film movement to his filmmaking (Simmons, 2013). He explained that he had spent two months in Rome early in his career and was highly impressed with filming techniques which allowed for shooting in ‘real’ situations: ‘you see something in the street, you may say, “I’m going to use *that*”’ (Simmons, 2013). Simmons was evidently inspired by what he saw the inherent humanity of Italian Neo-Realist films. In interview with Dolan and Spicer, Simmons singled out Antonioni’s *Il Grido* (1957) for particular attention – his comments about this film are revealing: ‘*Il Grido* concerns affection for the family and being dismayed when you lost that contact ... it certainly went to the root of my gut’ (Simmons quoted in Dolan and Spicer, 2008, p.135). This painful nostalgia for family and ‘home’ can be seen as a recurrent trope in Simmons’ films and, as I shall argue, was to colour both his reading of Ali’s *Dark Days, Light Nights* and the subsequent screenplay for *Black Joy*.

Simmons collaborated with the Free Cinema practitioners Walter Lassally and Leon Clore on his two critically acclaimed early short films, *Sunday by the Sea* (Simmons, 1951) and *Bow Bells* (Simmons, 1953) (Simmons, 2013). The Free Cinema movement advocated the use of ‘hand-held cameras’ and eschewed the ‘use of narration’ in documentary work (Dulphin, 2003, p.1). Although in interview,

Simmons was keen to distance his own work from that of the Free Cinema movement, the documentary realist style remains key in all of his films, not least *Black Joy* (Simmons, 2013). Like *Sunday by the Sea*, *Bow Bells* and *Four in the Morning* were shot on location (in the East End) and the former two films had evocative music hall soundtracks. All of these films have been described as vehicles through which Simmons could offer ‘affectionate portraits of the working-class community in which he was raised’ (Dolan and Spicer, 2008, p.132). In these and later films, Simmons’ nostalgia for both the people he grew up with, and for the East End itself is apparent. Indeed, it has been compellingly argued that in Simmons’ films, London is treated as a ‘character in its own right’ (Russell, n.d. n.p.).

Even as Simmons was making his films in the 1950s and early 1960s, the working-class East End community that he had known as a child was vanishing and slum-clearance programmes and the redevelopment of industrial sites had begun to change the location’s topography. By the 1970s, this ongoing process of the ‘gentrification’ of traditionally working-class areas forced Simmons to film in parts of London which were outside the East End, as he did with his 1973 film, *The Optimists of Nine Elms*. Simmons described London’s Nine Elms area thus: ‘[it] was a slum district on the south of the river facing Westminster on the other side’ (Simmons quoted in Dolan and Spicer, 2008, p.139). Part of Simmons’ motivation in filming such areas was bound up with an overarching nostalgia for ‘home’; this was manifest in an urgent desire to capture and record London’s ‘fast-disappearing’ working-class districts and lifestyles. *The Optimists of Nine Elms* tells how two children befriend an impoverished ageing busker, Old Sam (Peter Sellers), whose

previous life as a music hall star has seemingly been forgotten by all but him. In a scene that anticipates Devon's shadowing of Benjamin through the streets of Brixton, the young boy (John Chaffey) and girl (Donna Mullane) follow Old Sam as he walks past the Thames, through a busy street and into a pub. Unable to ignore their relentless chatter, Old Sam buys the children newspaper-wrapped jellied eels. They thank him, but ask what they are. As the three sit on a bridge watching working barges chug beneath them, the girl comments that this cannot be a 'real picnic' as it isn't in the country 'with grass and flowers and things'. Old Sam retorts that, 'a picnic's where you are enjoying it. A picnic's a bleeding picnic!' Old Sam gazes lovingly at the sepia water of the Thames and the crumbling industrial buildings around him and we understand that this is his pastoral idyll. Later, Old Sam wistfully sings the children a music hall song that is redolent of lost love. Concerned as it is with vanishing East End traditions, social 'outsiders', a nostalgia for past people and places, and bittersweet humour, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* perhaps exemplifies Simmons' urgent desire to capture, albeit mythically, the lost East End of his childhood.

Just a couple of years after Simmons made *The Optimists of Nine Elms*, the *South London Press* reported that the Department of the Environment had granted permission for luxury domestic dwellings for 'business couples' to be built in Nine Elms, an area hitherto described as 'one of London's most commercial areas' ('D of E go-ahead', 1977, p.3). By the late 1970s, then, locations that had traditionally provided London's working class with employment or shelter were almost disappearing faster than Simmons could film them. Nevertheless, when Simmons saw Jamal Ali's play *Dark Days, Light Nights*, he was still romantically bent on

‘wanting to do a film about the East End’ (Simmons, 2013). However, he was also painfully aware that ‘the East End that [he had known] was gone’ (Simmons quoted in Dolan and Spicer, 2008, p.141). With the black Brixton portrayed in *Dark Days, Light Nights* Simmons felt that at last he had found a location and community which could replicate the energy and dynamics found in his working-class, East End youth: ‘What ... I had done with *Sunday by the Sea* and *Bow Bells*, I thought, ‘I can do this again, in Brixton’ (Simmons, 2013).

Morley and Robins explain that ‘homeland’ invokes a memory of origin and inevitably involves a notion of an ‘impossible return to (imaginary or real) roots or origins’ (1993, p.11). It would seem therefore that Simmons, finding himself unable to return to his own ‘roots or origins’, overlaid *Dark Days, Light Nights* with his own nostalgic vision of ‘home’. Indeed, it can be suggested that it was this ‘nostalgia for (lost) home’ that facilitated his highly optimistic reading of *Dark Days, Light Nights*. Disastrously for Ali, Simmons seems to have overlooked the fact that *Dark Days, Light Nights*’ cautionary tale of an innocent ‘country boy’ corrupted by a hostile and alien Brixton, was highly political and ultimately tragic. As Norman Beaton commented, for Simmons, *Dark Days, Light Nights* was all about ‘a bubbling *joie de vivre* overriding the grime’ (Beaton, 1986, p.194), and as such was characteristic with the spirit of his earlier films.

Pre-production

Some months after he had secured Ali as his screenwriter for *Black Joy* (but with the film script not yet written), the film and television director Jack Gold introduced Simmons to the American film producer, Elliot Kastner (Simmons, 2013). Kastner

was an experienced and successful independent producer who had, by this time, been involved in a series of high-profile projects, most notably *Where Eagles Dare* (Hutton, 1968) (Summers, 1977, p.15). Kastner's involvement with *Black Joy* was to have significant implications in terms of creative agency. In a 1977 interview for *Screen International*, Simmons recalled that he pitched his ideas to Kastner at their first meeting (Summers, 1977, p.15). At this early stage, Simmons had a clear idea of what he wanted the tone of the film to be: '[I said to Kastner] it has to be funny, abrasive and fairly strong ... with lots of excitement and energy' (Simmons cited in Summers, 1977, p.15). Kastner, he was pleased to note, concurred from the outset that the film 'would go in this direction' (Simmons cited in Summers, 1977, p.15). It was agreed that Martin Campbell would be the film's line producer (Simmons, 2013). As Bernstein explains, the line producer is responsible, among other things, for overseeing the day to day running of a shoot and liaising frequently with the director and the producer (1994, pp. 74-75). Given the close working relationship that the line producer has with director and producer throughout a project, it is interesting to note that Campbell was known during this period for directing a series of bawdy low-budget sex comedies, including *Eskimo Nell* (1975) and *The Sex Thief* (1974) (Summers, 1977, p.15). Perhaps the appointment of Campbell gives some indication that Kastner had it in mind that the completed film would be somewhat salacious in content. Certainly, Jamal Ali was later to complain that, 'the play was quite lost and they wanted to make a kind of blaxploitation film' (Ali, 2008).

Such was Kastner's faith in *Black Joy* that he initially agreed to 'finance the film one hundred per cent' (Summers, 1977, p.15). This was on the proviso that Ali could produce a film script in under a month (Summers, 1977, p.15). Norman Beaton

recalled that Simmons put a huge amount of pressure on Ali to complete the script: ‘Jamal was virtually put under house arrest as the deadline ... drew nearer’ (Beaton, 1986, p.194). A key reason for Kastner’s insistence on such a tight deadline for the script was that even at the pre-production stage, he had ambitions to take the picture to Cannes; in order for this to happen, the film would need to be finished by the beginning of April 1977 (Summers, 1977, p.15). Ultimately, Kastner persuaded the NFFC to finance fifty per cent of the film, but this was some time after shooting had commenced; *Black Joy* had an eventual budget of just under £150 000 (Summers, 1977, p.15; Baddes 1977, p.228). As Simmons ruefully commented in interview, ‘Even then it was absolute peanuts. I mean nobody got paid, even me’ (Simmons, 2013). However, from the outset, Kastner felt that the film, although low-budget, had the potential to be hugely successful at the box office (Summers, 1977, p.15). Indeed, Simmons recalled that he, ‘thought at the time that the film was going to be my pension’ (Simmons, 2013).

Kastner and Simmons decided that *Dark Days, Light Nights*’ original Black Theatre of Brixton stage cast would largely be replaced with high-profile professional actors for the film (Ali, 2008). There were practical reasons for this decision. Kastner felt that ‘well-known black actors’ such as Norman Beaton would be a draw for audiences (Summers, 1977, p.15). Indeed in interview, Simmons recalled that ‘Norman Beaton was going to be our star [and] everything was going to develop from that’ (Simmons, 2013). Norman Beaton, of course, was by this time strongly associated in the local community with his role as the Black Theatre of Brixton’s artistic director (Beaton, 1986, p.169). In this way, the casting of Norman Beaton could be seen to underline the film’s community roots. Ali was certainly pleased

that Beaton was to play the role of Dave King in the film, later describing him as ‘a natural actor’ whose ‘intellect’, experiences ‘on the street’, and somewhat colourful private life, allowed him to ‘play the parts for real’ (Ali, 2012). However, the majority of actors who made up the Black Theatre of Brixton were non-professional and therefore not members of Equity (Ali, 2008). Ali explained that this, allied with their relative lack of experience, meant that only a couple of Black Theatre of Brixton actors ‘got very spare parts [in the film], I mean simply extras’ (Ali, 2008). Shango Baku and Archie Pool, both of whom had been in RAPP and the Black Theatre of Brixton, did appear in *Black Joy*. Baku, who played the radicalised Jahn-Jahn in RAPP’s *Black Feet in the Snow*, has a (credited) cameo role as a ‘Rastaman’ who visits Brixton’s jobcentre. It is perhaps telling that this particular scene is played as a humorous episode in which he berates the staff about their copious tea-drinking. Likewise, Pool, who does not appear in *Black Joy*’s credits, plays the small role of Boney ‘Anne’ Frank, a feckless gambler who has a fight with Dave and Benjamin in a Brixton betting shop. This can perhaps be compared to his politically-nuanced role in *Black Feet in the Snow*, as a ‘betting man’ who desperately contemplates gambling his meagre savings in order that he might flee a hostile London for ‘home’. This perhaps illustrates a central paradox with *Black Joy*; on one hand there is an emphasis on ‘local’ black ‘authenticity’, but on the other, the politically radical element of this identity is largely removed. I will now explore the way in which the struggles at the level of the script continued during the location shoot.

Scripting on Location

Black Joy was filmed mainly in and around Brixton, over a six-week period commencing in January 1977. It was during filming that major differences in Ali's and Simmons' respective visions for the tone and focus of *Black Joy* became explicit, and Ali's authorial voice was heavily compromised. It was perhaps inevitable, given their diametrically opposed ideas of immigrant life in Brixton, that Simmons was discontented with Ali's initial script for the film. Certainly, Ali revealed that over the six-week duration of filming, Simmons had insisted that numerous scenes were edited and reworked (Ali, 2008). In interview, Simmons was candid about this process: 'I would [imagine] ... the whole thing as a ... Jewish story. And Jamal would [write] it into the *Black Joy* story. To me it was an East End story set in Brixton' (Simmons, 2013). In his autobiography, Norman Beaton commented on Simmons' unorthodox insistence on daily rewrites and complained about the challenges that this presented to him as an actor: 'I just gave up, adjusted to the rewrites, learnt them while the cameras were setting up and, automaton-like, made my way in front of the cameras' (Beaton, 1986, p.165). Unsurprisingly the completed *Black Joy* bore little resemblance to *Dark Days, Light Nights*, or to Ali's original script for the film (Ali, 2008). Simmons was intent on cutting out the radical material leaving a script that was much more anodyne than Ali had intended it to be: '[Simmons] made the movie into what I did not want the movie made into ... the radicalness had gone and had become a joyous situation. Whereas I was thinking it was much more brutal than that' (Ali, 2008). That Simmons had a desire to remove the script's radicalism and to replace it with 'a joyous situation', is underlined by comments that he made in interview:

I don't want to get involved in the story of the blacks and the issue of slavery and all the rest of it. That's not the object. The object is that I wanted to make the comedy film that I would

have made about my home town [the East End] ... My feeling was that it [Brixton] had the same gaiety ... I wasn't going to do *Black Joy* as a black film about how terrible it was to be black (Simmons, 2013).

Simmons insistence that *Black Joy* would not be a 'black film' about black oppression meant that he chose to strongly foreground the hedonistic behaviour displayed by characters such as Dave King. Ali stated that this was at the expense of any political insight into the characters' actions (Ali, 2012). When Dave King moves Benjamin into his squalid flat, he describes his lifestyle to the credulous country boy thus: 'Every man got to have a specialism. I specialise in collecting social welfare, smoking ganja, holing pussy and spreading joy'. As Ali explained, his original intention in writing about 'characters [like King, who] go out drinking, go out and get stoned [and] do not want to go home when the evening is over', was to show that some members of his community, faced with unrelenting racism and poverty, chose to blot out the harsh realities of life with drugs and transient sexual encounters (Ali, 2012):

[It is] an escape. An escape by getting your head blasted ... because the alternative is to face that reality. Of not having this or not having that, can't feed their family and so forth. So I was writing against all those backgrounds and knowledge [of] domestic problems. [Also] I was writing about infidelity in the community. Almost everything in *Black Joy* [in my original script] threw up a lot about infidelity (Ali, 2012).

Whereas *Dark Days*, *Light Nights* could be seen as a political 'call to arms' which provided theatre audiences with the viable alternative of black militancy rather than hedonistic oblivion, the eventual re-working of the play for a film audience arguably left only the briefest of 'gaps' for similar contemplation. In this way, certain aspects of *Dark Days*, *Light Nights*' overarching political narrative can be fleetingly glimpsed in *Black Joy*. Examples include Benjamin's abject fear in the homeless shelter, the lack of respect that staff show him when he visits the labour exchange

and the slowing down of a police car as he walks along Somerleyton Road. Perhaps the most telling ‘gap for contemplation’ is when Jomo sadly asks the now street-wise Benjamin, ‘Where did that country boy go? Where did he go?’

Nevertheless, the prevailing tone of *Black Joy* is one of exuberant optimism.

Arguably this is partly due to the way in which Simmons’ nostalgic documentary realism is overlaid with a racy blaxploitation narrative. *Black Joy* then, is largely peopled by sexually voracious ‘blaxploitation’ characters and gregarious ‘cockneys’; interestingly, these two ‘types’ are sometimes interchangeable in the film. When Brixton’s space *is* contested within the film itself, as when the lost migrant Benjamin, asks the white ‘cheery cockney’ butcher for directions, this is conveyed as mere ‘light-hearted banter’: ‘My family have been here since 1848, a hundred years before your lot moved in’. Any discomfiture at this racist statement, is arguably diffused when the scene evolves into a bravura ‘comic turn’ on the part of the butcher who talks animatedly about ‘all the Sunday roasts’ that he has to prepare. Generally however, the black characters in *Black Joy* ‘own’ Brixton’s streets, shops and pubs with the same confidence as the white butcher; seemingly for Simmons, they too are ‘cockneys’. This is confirmed by Simmons’ stated insistence that he was ‘not making a racial film’: ‘The jokes [in *Black Joy*] were London jokes, they were not black jokes’ (Simmons, 2013).

In interview, Simmons revealed that it was his idea to add the character of the small black boy, Devon, to *Black Joy* (Simmons, 2013). As Simmons explained, Devon’s key role was to ‘guide’ the film audience around ‘the magic world of Brixton’ (Simmons, 2013). In some ways reminiscent of Dickens’ Artful Dodger, Devon is afforded a liminal position which allows him to confidently negotiate Brixton’s

geographical space and to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the behaviour of the adults around him. It is worth noting at this point, that the character of Devon has much in common with the young girl in *The Optimists of Nine Elms*. In a 1976 interview, Simmons explained why he had cast a local child, Donna Mullane, in *The Optimists of Nine Elms*:

[I] ... chose the girl because she already had a lived-in face by the age of ten and you could see the toughness that being brought up in this corner of London [Nine Elms] can develop, but at the same time she had something else, she had eyes that could see the magic in life, she is the optimist ... But [there was] nothing fake romantic [about her role] (Simmons quoted in Hames, 1976, p.44).

In many respects, this could also describe Devon in *Black Joy*; like the girl in *The Optimists of Nine Elms*, he can be seen as a ‘tough outsider’ with a zest for life that is rooted in hardship. Both then, are Dickensian ‘knowing’ children who are privy to the nasty secrets of the adult world. To this end, the viewer of *Black Joy* is left in no doubt that Devon, who is seen swaggering through Brixton’s Granville Arcade, is an authentic ‘child of the ghetto’. During his first early meeting with the newly arrived Benjamin, Devon is quick to describe the adult in depreciating terms as a ‘country boy’ with all the connotations of innocence and virginity that the term infers. By contrast, Devon is sexually knowing, something that is shockingly underlined when Benjamin politely enquires about Devon’s name. ‘That’s where me Pa fucked me Ma and that’s how they got me’ is Devon’s glib reply. Seconds later, he runs off with Benjamin’s savings. Later in the film, Devon even seems to take on the role of a pimp. ‘You want to fuck me sister Saffra?’ he asks a shocked Benjamin. Arguably, Devon (and Dave King) encapsulate most of the key traits of the American ‘blaxploitation’ hero: so-called ‘black super males’ who rule the ghetto as ‘pimps, dope pushers and gangsters’ (Griffin taken from Bogle, 1989, p.242).

The label of ‘black super male’ could also be applied to *Black Joy*’s Jomo. Whereas Jomo was *Dark Days, Light Night*’s ‘Black Power brother’ and the play’s moral compass, his character was re-written for the film and he was reduced to the role of an apolitical hustler. If the diasporic ‘country boy’ in *Dark Days, Light Nights* was exposed to Black Power politics as well as Brixton’s more dubious ‘attractions’, in *Black Joy*, the politics were largely stripped away, leaving only his moral corruption.

Unusually, Simmons allowed Ali to be present on *Black Joy*’s set during the filming of certain key scenes (Ali, 2008). This was possibly in order that Ali could contribute to ongoing revisions to the script. However, this did not afford Ali the creative agency that might have been expected from such a move. Norman Beaton remembered how a deeply unhappy Ali approached him after the first week of filming and said, ‘I don’t like how the script is turning out. It ain’t *my* play anymore’ (1986, p.194). In interview, Ali gave an example of his lack of autonomy during the filming process. He recalled that he was on set at the Que Club when the scene between Benjamin, his girlfriend Saffra, and Sally, the white woman, was being filmed. Here, Saffra confronts Sally, who then goes on to seduce Benjamin. For Ali, this ought to have been an emotionally sensitive scene which would make an important political point, namely that such incidents served to undermine black solidarity (Ali, 2008). However, the eventual scene was ‘played for laughs’ and, as Ali explained, ‘the energy was quite gone’ (Ali, 2008). Saffra is depicted as a ‘hysterical girl’ who, on spotting Benjamin dancing with Sally screams: ‘How much did you pay for *this* piece of pork?’ Sally, by contrast, is quietly ‘sophisticated and sexy’ and whispers softly to Benjamin, ‘I’ve got the same as she’s got, it’s just that *we* don’t choose to make such a fuss about it’. Ali stated that he was so enraged

during the filming of this particular scene that he shouted ‘Cut!’ (Ali 2008). It is perhaps telling that despite Ali’s evident anger and discontentment, Simmons simply ordered him off the set and continued filming the scene to his own specifications (Ali, 2008).

In interview, Ali admitted that he had been somewhat naïve about the film industry. Used to authorial control over his projects, he realised far too late that, ‘in the movie business ... they have the rights to the play and therefore ... *I was expendable*’ (Ali, 2008). Ali’s comment that, as the author of *Black Joy*’s original screenplay, he ‘was expendable’ is seemingly reflected in the film’s opening credits. Here, both Ali and Simmons are credited as *Black Joy*’s screenwriters. Moreover, Ali’s name is positioned some way below that of Simmons, perhaps giving the impression that Simmons is the main author of the screenplay and that Ali merely assisted him. The accompanying line: ‘based on Jamal Ali’s play *Dark Days and [sic] Light Nights*’, which gives an incorrect title for the original play, could arguably stand for *Black Joy*’s contested authorship.

Shooting on location

Much of *Black Joy* was shot on location in and around Brixton and utilised some seventy locations (Summers, 1977, p.15). Simmons’ decision to ‘take the cameras out on the streets’ and to film *Black Joy* entirely on location can primarily be seen in the light of his aforementioned collaborations with Leon Clore and Walter Lassally and his interest in Italian Neo-Realism. However, in 1977, additional factors made working on location attractive. The numerous economic crises of the 1970s had rendered studio space expensive and consequently, as the decade progressed, there

was a trend for British filmmakers to rely heavily on the much cheaper option of location shooting (Wood, 1983, pp. 95-138). Perhaps even more importantly, advances in cinema technology during the 1970s saw the advent of a new generation of 'lightweight compact' cameras such as the Arriflex BL which 'allowed operators to shoot practically anywhere' (Petrie, 1996, p.58). Film stock also became faster, meaning that it was now possible to shoot in locations that had low light levels (Petrie, 1996, p.58). *Black Joy's* cinematographer, Philip Meheux capitalised on the new technology. The lightweight hand-held cameras used to film *Black Joy* enabled fast and flexible working, in natural light, affording little in the way of disturbance to members of the public who were filmed going about their daily business on Brixton's streets (Meheux taken from Summers, 1977, p.15). Moreover, Meheux could now film the dim interiors of buildings such as the Que Club in Baker Street, the Brixton pubs, The Atlantic and The Angel, and dwellings in Brixton's Coldharbour Lane. In a 1977 interview, *Black Joy's* line producer, Martin Campbell, explained that such was the minimal nature of the equipment being used that it could all 'be contained in a small VW van [with] no cables and no fuss' (Campbell taken from Summers, 1977, p.16). *Black Joy's* low budget necessitated a gruelling schedule for both actors and technicians; generally around two hours were spent in any one location before quickly moving on to the next (Summers, 1977, p.16).

Simmons' mode of filming then, can be seen in terms of a double articulation. On one hand the documentary form could be seen to facilitate a sympathetic pursuit of authenticity, but on the other, Simmons' imputation of his own nostalgic gaze upon Brixton's community can be seen to be voyeuristic and alienating. Much of *Black*

Joy was shot on Brixton's streets without permission or prior warning, meaning that some residents found themselves being filmed as they went about their daily business or had cameras pointed at their homes or shops. To follow Clifford, it is possible to see that this process which would ultimately facilitate a voyeuristic 'zone of contact' for cinema audiences. In other words, the melding of the topography of Brixton's streets, homes and workplaces with Simmons' 'spectacular' scenes of black life, perhaps meant that audiences from within the community were confused and distressed by what they saw on screen. On the other hand, the film's documentary reality aesthetic may have convinced those from 'outside' Brixton that they were privy to the 'degrading secrets' of the community. One such example of a 'voyeuristic zone of contact' is when the viewer follows Devon into the louche interior of the Atlantic pub. Inside the pub, a group of black men gamble and openly smoke dope, and an aging prostitute tells an erstwhile client (Norman Beaton) to 'go and fuck yourself'. Maybe in this way, it is possible to see that conflicts over black identity and the authorship of *Black Joy* are located in Brixton *itself*.

Seemingly, some of Brixton's black residents found the idea of what the *South London Press* billed as 'a black community film', an enticing prospect. During filming, a prominent story in the local press promised readers that the film would have a '75% black cast' and made much of the fact that the script was written 'by Black Theatre of Brixton director, Jamal Ali [and adapted] from his comedy *Dark Days, Light Nights*' ('On location', 1977, p.6). Moreover, the news that the film was to star Norman Beaton, who was by this time one of Britain's most famous black actors (and something of a 'local celebrity' in Brixton), caused a good deal of eager anticipation in the community (Stacy, 2010). Some people evidently embraced the

fact that they ‘found themselves’ being filmed in Brixton. Michael, a young man who lived in Brixton, was happy to be an unwitting extra on *Black Joy*. He recalled that he was drinking in ‘his local’, the Angel pub in Coldharbour Lane, when the camera crew turned up:

They walked in with their equipment and they came up to me and they said that I should stay and be one of the extras ... So that’s how I ended up being in the film by sitting at the bar while they were filming ... it was good to know that I was part of that (Michael, personal communication, August 25, 2010).

However, by the time that shooting was taking place, parts of Brixton such as Coldharbour Lane had come to be strongly associated in the wider public consciousness with ‘dangerous’ black radicalism and ‘lawlessness’ (Baddes, 1977, p.228). As Hall et al. have argued, heavily amplified reportage in the mainstream press throughout the mid-to-late 1970s, helped to construct the notion that inner city areas with a ‘substantial black settlement’ were ‘virtually synonymous’ with ‘black crime’ (Hall et al. 1978, p.327). They stated that this was ‘especially [the case] in the London area’ (Hall et al. 1978, p.378). Hall et al. have suggested that the high-profile policing of black communities during this period can, at least in part, be seen as a response to a moral panic (1978, p.299). Nevertheless it can be argued that by dint of their draconian approach to the policing of areas such as Lambeth, the police effectively reinforced the idea that black communities were crime-ridden communities (James, 1978, p.3). As I have argued in 2.1 of this thesis, the police Special Patrol Group (SPG) were an almost continual presence in Brixton from around 1973 onwards (Keith, 1987, p.292). *Race Today* highlighted the way in which police stop and search activities, and raids on black homes and meeting places, had risen exponentially with the arrival of the SPG in Brixton (‘Brixton Specials’, 1973, p.68). Indeed, the Black Marxist newspaper *Flame*, was to later

comment that Brixton's black communities were 'all too familiar with constant police harassment' (James, 1978, p.3). *Flame* complained that wholly innocent young black men were routinely stopped by police in Brixton and accused of street theft (James, 1978, p.3). To this end, there were local concerns that filming in Brixton would be of further detriment to its black communities and the wider public's image of the area. This is reflected in a *South London Press* report from January 14 1977:

[Lambeth Chamber of Commerce] claims the filming [of *Black Joy*] will discourage people from coming to Brixton at a time when local traders face serious difficulties ... Chamber of Commerce chairman Mr Righelato said, 'We feel strongly that this sort of publicity will not do the trading community any good because people will be afraid to come here ('Black community film', 1977, p.11).

One of the reasons that filming in Coldharbour Lane a few days previously had caused so much consternation among Brixton residents was because it involved what the *South London Press* referred to as 'a handbag snatching sequence' ('Black community film', 1977, p.11). This is the controversial scene where Benjamin has his money stolen by Devon. A local shopkeeper who ran a cycle shop in Coldharbour Lane told the *South London Press*:

I was serving a customer last Wednesday when I heard a lot of shouting and saw a crowd outside. Then I noticed the film camera, which was pointed straight at my shop. I protested and told them to stop filming at once (taken from 'Black community film', 1977, p.11).

The anxiety that *Black Joy* would somehow bring Brixton into disrepute can hardly have been assuaged by a further report in the *South London Press* that appeared a week later. The article assured readers that the finished film would provide a 'university of the streets course' from which they could learn the tricks of 'hustling' ('On Location', 1977, p.6). Such evidence perhaps reveals the ways in which the

community as film set was transformed into a contact zone for hopes and fears about self-representation and identity. This notion will be further explored in part 3.4.

Marketing *Black Joy*

Arguably, the way in which *Black Joy* was marketed further distanced it from Jamal Ali's original creative vision. Even as filming was taking place in Brixton, Simmons and Kastner told *Screen International* that they were determined that *Black Joy* would not be labelled as a 'parochial film' (Summers, 1977, p.15). Given the strong community roots of Ali's work, this perhaps gives some indication as to how polarised their respective ideas of *Black Joy* were. As if to underline this, Simmons made it clear that he was keen to situate the film firmly in the mainstream and that *Black Joy* should not be regarded primarily as a 'black movie': 'It's a film about individuals, a mass audience film. And if it ends up being shown only in Notting Hill, then we've failed miserably' (Simmons taken from Summers, 1977, p.15). It should be noted that this can be interpreted differently from Gavrik Losey's approach to marketing *Babylon*. Clearly both producers wanted their respective films to reach a wide audience. However whereas Losey's canny approach was tempered by a strong desire to maintain *Babylon*'s black integrity, Kastner's primary concern appears have been *Black Joy*'s financial bottom line. Indeed, Kastner's interventions when the film was completed make it evident that *Black Joy* was primarily intended for a mainstream (white) market. Martin Barker has argued that publicity materials such as film posters can be seen as 'discursive preparations' which help to 'shape [audience] expectations ... for the act of viewing' (Barker, 2004). Such material then, helps to target particular niche audiences (Barker, 2004). *Black Joy*'s main poster was in the gaudy tradition of artwork for blaxploitation

films such as *Superfly* (Parks, 1972) and featured all of the attributes generally found in the genre (see appendix 2). The black ‘super male’ (Dave King) is shown against a backdrop of a ‘sexy’ long-legged girl, a neon sign for a strip-club and a naked black couple (Dave King and a prostitute) in bed together. In line with other posters for blaxploitation films, an advert for the soundtrack is prominent. All that sets this poster apart from its American counterparts is the inclusion of a dustbin lorry and a row of houses that is quite obviously Brixton’s Coldharbour Lane. In light of Norman Beaton’s star status, Kastner ensured that he was afforded top billing in the film’s publicity. To this end, *Black Joy*’s poster deliberately positions Dave King as the hero of the film. Benjamin is present, but only as a small figure seen walking with Devon. This decision, whilst understandable in economic terms, is again at odds with Ali’s own idea of *Black Joy* which clearly placed the innocent ‘country boy’, Benjamin, as the film’s key protagonist. Given the appeal of blaxploitation films to black audiences in the 1970s, it could be argued that to promote *Black Joy* in this manner would not have alienated this particular demographic. However, additional marketing interventions made it abundantly clear that the completed film was primarily intended for white audiences. As John Ellis explains, posters provide cinema audiences with a ‘narrative image’ that ‘explicitly’ frame a film’s ‘particular set of concerns’ (1982, p.67). Advance publicity posters for *Black Joy* featured lurid strip cartoons and an invitation that invited the viewer to ‘spend a night out in Brixton’ (Rugg, 1978, p.13). Arguably, this particular ‘narrative image’ served to position Brixton’s black communities as ‘the exotic other’. Indeed, Akua Rugg, writing for *Race Today*, wryly commented that it was highly unlikely that the black residents of Brixton would ‘welcome a written invitation to their own home[s]’ (1978, p.13). She argued that the only supposition that could be taken from such a

request was that *Black Joy* was intended for white moviegoers (Rugg, 1978, p.13).

The voyeuristic implications of the film's publicity were highlighted by Rugg, who complained that the posters seemed intent on rousing white people's 'prurient' curiosity about 'certain aspects of black social life' (1978, p.13).

***Black Joy* at the Cannes Film Festival**

Kastner achieved his stated ambition of entering *Black Joy* in the 1977 Cannes Film Festival. In his autobiography, Norman Beaton wrote that Kastner arranged for Ali, Simmons and the film's cast, to be flown to Cannes for the screening of *Black Joy* (Beaton, 1986, p.195). He recalled that once in Cannes, 'Elliot [Kastner] ... treated us like royalty ... A white Bentley took us to interviews and the screening' (Beaton, 1986, p.195). Beaton described the 'night of the screening' as 'exhilarating' and wrote of his elation at watching the completed (subtitled) film with a 'discerning French audience' (1986, pp.195-196). Although *Black Joy* ultimately lost out to Ridley Scott's debut *The Duellists* (1977), it was evidently well-received by the audience and judges (Beaton, 1986, p.196). Beaton was pleasantly surprised that the audience had laughed uproariously 'at what was some of the most gamey language ever heard in a British movie' and had given 'sustained applause' as the closing credits rolled (1986, p.196). According to Beaton, the performance that the Cannes audience responded most favourably to was that of 'seven-year-old Paul Medford' in his role as Devon (Beaton, 1986, p.196). As Janet Harbord has argued, film festivals such as Cannes create their own unique 'space as [a] place of cultural flow' which may influence the meanings that audiences attach to a particular film text (2002, p.61). The cultural, temporal and geographical contexts in which films are viewed then, help to shape the ways in which audiences' 'interpretations are formed'

(Barker, 2004, p.). As will be discussed in the next section, when *Black Joy* was shown in Brixton, some audience members read the character of Devon in highly negative terms, which is perhaps instructive.

Nevertheless, Norman Beaton was evidently proud that *Black Joy*, an ‘all black film’ had been shown in Cannes and had ‘come out with flying colours’ (Beaton, 1986, p.196). He later wrote that this positive reaction to the film provided him with a vindication for the previous difficulties that he and Ali had experienced with the funding of the Black Theatre of Brixton (Beaton, 1986, p.196: see also 3.1 of this thesis). However, unlike Beaton, who seemingly revelled in the visit to Cannes, Ali found the experience deeply alienating:

I was terrified [in Cannes] [laughs] obviously, look, I’m a poet, basically I’m a poet. I’m used to confronting [theatre] audiences ... But when I went to Cannes, there was something different, I mean there was about two hundred cameras ... and there was a big hotel where I used to stay ... Roger Moore and all them people stayed, they were all there (Ali, 2008).

Beaton was satisfied with the completed *Black Joy*, but for Ali, seeing the film for the first time in Cannes confirmed his fears that his authorial voice had been heavily compromised. In short, he was deeply upset at the way that *Black Joy* had turned out (Ali, 2008). In interview Ali revealed that as he watched *Black Joy* on the screen, he began to plan to tell the assembled press that Simmons and Kastner had taken ‘my play and messed it up’ (Ali, 2008). It says much about Ali’s generosity of character that, despite his anger, his loyalty to the cast ultimately prevented him from taking a stand at the press conference that followed the screening:

When Norman [Beaton] started to speak, and Floella Benjamin started to speak and the youngster [Paul Medford] ... then I started to find, what can I say ... it might affect these other people who were in the movie, like Norman and Trevor Thomas ... and other people ... and they were my friends. I decided that the actors who were my people ... were more important than my bellyaching (Ali, 2008).

Unused to compromise in his professional life, Ali stated that he found the interview with the press humiliating: '[it] wasn't a good interview for me and it wasn't very nice ... I never cut the corners but *there* I cut a corner ... I felt very small to be honest with you' (Ali, 2008).

***Black Joy's* first London screening**

Kastner was careful to select Plaza 2 in London's Lower Regent Street as the venue for *Black Joy's* gala opening in November 1977 (Beaton, 1986, p.197). As with Cannes, Kastner's marketing ambitions were for the film to reach as wide an audience as possible. Arguably in choosing to open the film in a cinema near to Piccadilly, Kastner further alienated black audiences. At this time, Plaza 2 could be expected to bring in audiences largely consisting of tourists to London or well-healed white Londoners on a night out in the West End (Rugg, 1978, p.13). However, for much of London's black population, especially young black men, a night out in Piccadilly could be seen to be an unattractive prospect. In the late 1970s, the Institute of Race Relations reported that London's West End had become a virtual 'no-go' area for black people, such was the widespread use of the 'Sus' laws by the Metropolitan police (Institute of Race Relations, 1979, p.41). According to the Institute of Race Relations, police colloquially referred to young black men as 'handbag dippers' and regarded them as easy targets for stop and search activities (1979, p.41). Evidently, comments by police officers such as 'go back and tell your black friends to keep off the High Street' were not uncommon (Institute of Race Relations, 1979, p.41). Perhaps this further underlines that Kastner was only really interested in attracting a mainstream mass audience for *Black Joy*, rather than a community audience.

Initial responses to *Black Joy* were predominantly favourable. As previously mentioned, the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) had funded fifty per cent of the film (Summers, 1977, p.15). In its annual report for 1978, the NFFC described *Black Joy* as a 'successful example of original cinema' and evidently felt that its money had been well spent (NFFC, 1978, p.7). According to Norman Beaton and Jamal Ali, there were little in the way of negative reviews in the mainstream press (1986, p.197; Ali, 2008). The *Guardian* newspaper described *Black Joy* as 'the most exuberant new British film for some time', a comment that was seemingly typical (taken from Beaton, 1986, p.197). Even the specialised cinema journal *Monthly Film Bulletin* was largely positive about *Black Joy*, describing it as 'infectious and entertaining with splendid dialogue' (Baddes, 1977, p.228).

However, radical black publications were far more critical. The Black Marxist newspaper *Flame* complained that the film 'was an insult to the struggles of the black population' as it provided a vacuous representation of black people as 'happy hustlers and pimps' ('Pressure', 1978, p.6). As *Flame* pointed out, there was little in the film to suggest 'the reality of oppression' that black communities were facing in London at this time ('Pressure', 1978, p.6). In the same way, Akua Rugg, writing for *Race Today* magazine, hated *Black Joy*'s voyeuristic reduction of black lived experience to that of 'sex, drugs and violence' in the 'ghetto' (1978, p.13). Rugg complained that *Black Joy* 'glossed over' the socio-economic travails faced by Brixton's black communities (1978, p.13). She argued that white cinemagoers could easily come away with the impression that 'blacks ... [were content to] use their energies for nothing more than acquiring casual sex, dope and flash cars' (1978, p.13). Nevertheless, Rugg, who presumably knew nothing of Ali's struggle with

Simmons over the making of *Black Joy* (and does not mention either man in her review) perceived that the original author of the film's script had a very different intention to that which was finally depicted on the screen:

The attention to detail ... suggests [that] ... the original concept of the film ... [was] more than sheer entertainment. Some passages in the film pay homage to certain aspects of Caribbean culture – its patois, ways of dressing, moving and being. This aspect of the film is particularly strong (Rugg, 1978, p.13).

Black Joy was withdrawn from distribution after three months due to a dispute over unpaid music licences (Simmons quoted in Dolan and Spicer, 2008, p.141).

However, the film was screened in the local community. Within this context, issues of 'black authenticity' and 'cultural slippage' were further contested, as will be discussed in part 3.4.

Conclusion

In his work on diaspora, James Clifford has written that 'travel ... [can be] seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences ... Practices of displacement ... emerge as *constitutive* of cultural meanings rather than their simple transfer or extension [original emphasis] (1997, p.3). It is instructive to consider Clifford's comments firstly, in light of the adaptation of Ali's stage play *Dark Days, Light Nights* for the cinema, and secondly, in terms of the physical and discursive 'journey' undertaken by the resultant text, *Black Joy*. To follow Clifford, it is possible to posit both the Guyanese Ali, and the Jewish Simmons, as diasporic 'displaced travellers'. To this end, both Ali and Simmons had clear ideas as to what constituted 'immigrant life' in Brixton. Whereas Ali's vision for *Black Joy* was a deeply politicised one which was heavily imbued with notions of Black Power ideology, Simmons instead sought to overlay Brixton's black community with a nostalgic re-creation of the lost East End 'home' of his youth. 'Cultural meaning'

intersects at this point in *Black Joy* and complex readings are made; as I will go on to illustrate in part 3.4, ‘local’ black audiences craved (and sometimes discovered glimpses of) ‘authenticity’, but also found the ‘joyous’ screen portrayal of Brixton’s black communities insulting and alienating.

However, it is important to consider *Black Joy*’s contested authorship in the light of the institutional context of filmmaking itself. As Chapman et al. argue, filmmaking can be seen as an industrial endeavour that is reliant on ‘the input of a range of creative agencies’ (2007, p.69). Simmons, Kastner, Campbell and the majority of the film’s actors and crew were all travellers to Brixton and all to a greater or lesser extent added their creative voices to *Black Joy*. Under Simmons’ direction and Campbell’s eye, the frequently-exhausted film crew shot Brixton’s recondite interiors, ‘notorious’ streets and busy crowds; Kastner jetted from California to arrive on the set at 6.30am on the first day of filming; the actors Paul Medford and Trevor Thomas were mistaken by a Brixton shop owner as ‘locals’; ‘locals’ themselves were unwittingly drawn into the melee of filming (Summers, 1977, p.15: ‘Black community film’, 1977, p.11). The medium of film then, is very different from that of stage or television, although all are collaborative endeavours. As a medium, it is of course, neutral, but in the words of Chapman et al, it is often possible to ‘establish distinctive voices among the prevailing babble of discourses during a film’s production’ (2007, p.70). In this case, the screenwriter’s voice was lost in the babble. The production history of *Black Joy* reveals clear evidence of manipulation in the filmmaking process that transferred creative agency away from Ali. In this way, Ali’s comment to Beaton, during filming, that *Black Joy* ‘ain’t my play anymore’ is deeply telling (Beaton, 1986, p.194).

Clifford has written that, for the diasporic traveller, ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ are necessarily complicated; patterns may become intertwined or simply fall away and the two may become polarised (1997, p.3). With Clifford’s ideas in mind, it is possible to consider, the ‘journey’ that *Black Joy*’s text *itself* can be seen to have undertaken. *Black Joy* began its life as *Dark Days, Light Nights*, a politically-didactic stage play that had its roots firmly in Brixton’s black community. The film travelled firstly to Cannes where the festival environment helped to overlay it with a veneer of luxury and decadence that arguably tore the text away from Brixton. The alienation of the film from Brixton was perhaps further underlined by *Black Joy*’s French subtitles. In the context of Cannes, *Black Joy* was mere ‘frothy entertainment’ replete with ‘gamey language’ (Beaton, 1986, p.194). *Black Joy* then made its way to a gala opening in London’s West End. Clifford posits that ‘contact zones’ delineate those marginal spaces where cultural exchange is especially contested (1997, p.7). It is instructive then, to consider that this particular screening of *Black Joy* took place in a heavily policed area of London that had become a virtual no-go area for black people. Viewed in this geographical space, critical responses to the film were seemingly polarised; it was generally praised by the mainstream press, but radical black publications were scathing. *Black Joy* finally (and briefly) returned to Brixton, where it was screened at the ACE cinema. For Ali the exhibiting of the film in his ‘local community’, was both a professional and personal disaster:

[In] my local community ... there were some black radicals who were saying that I sold out and that they were putting a ‘wanted’ poster on my head. Wanted for betrayal, you know? And therefore and for some time I just did not go into Ladbroke Grove, for instance ... the people think that I betrayed them ... and the cause, the black cause if you like (Ali, 2008).

The following section interrogates this visceral community response to *Black Joy* in the light of audience research and the cultural geography of Brixton.

3.4 'Bringing it all back home' – *Black Joy* comes to Brixton

Introduction

This section explores local responses to *Black Joy* in the light of audience research. The 'creative struggles' which vexed Ali during the production process seemingly shaped *Black Joy*'s critical reception in the memories of black audiences where the film was shot and shown. James Clifford has written about the 'processes of identification and antagonism' inherent in the 'performance' of diasporic 'culture' (1997, p.9). As I will go on to show, this 'processes of identification and antagonism' can perhaps be seen in *Black Joy*'s local reception by black audiences; identification at the level of the film's documentary-realist visual aesthetic, but antagonism at the level of the script too.

Black Joy was distributed through the Odeon chain of cinemas. A trawl through *Time Out* reveals that *Black Joy* was on release 'all over London at Odeon and selected cinemas from November 6 1977' until February 23 1978 - a fairly typical run for a British low-budget niche feature film. It is telling that *Black Joy* had its longest run at Plaza 2 in Lower Regent Street (from its 'gala night' on November 3 1977 until December 30 1977). Indeed, the film's success in this venue suggests that it appealed to white rather than black audiences. *Black Joy* played for a week at the ACE cinema in Brixton from November 19 1977 (Local cinemas, 1977, p.49). It was not held over for a further week, nor was it shown again at the ACE at any later date. This can be contrasted with the ACE cinema's repeated screenings of *Babylon* mentioned in part 2.4. In short, *Babylon* appears to have had a much more

favourable reception from the ACE's audience. Mindful of this, I will now go on to discuss local audience responses to *Black Joy*.

***Black Joy's* Brixton reception**

The interviews discussed in this section of the chapter are the result of an advert that I placed in *Lambeth Life* in August 2010 (see appendix 3). I received responses, by email, from two men who had seen *Black Joy* in November 1977. One was from Michael whose recollections about being an extra in *Black Joy* are detailed in the previous chapter. The other was from Stacy whose observations about watching *Babylon* are discussed in part 2.4 of this thesis. Both men are among the group of so-called 'second-generation' black British people born to immigrant parents in London in the late 1950s. I travelled to Brixton and conducted separate semi-structured interviews with Stacy and Michael. Michael was accompanied by his girlfriend, Paulette, who made occasional contributions to the interview. Michael stated that he was first aware that *Black Joy* was being filmed when he became an extra in a Brixton pub, The Atlantic (Michael, 2010). Stacy asserted that he had found out that *Black Joy* was being made after overhearing a conversation between his 'film-obsessed' Trinidadian father, and a group of friends (Stacy, 2010). In interview, Stacy recalled that the film had been keenly anticipated by local black audiences. He stated that news of *Black Joy* quickly spread among black communities, despite there being little in the way of official publicity for the film: 'It [*Black Joy*] might have been advertised [but] ... Not so much a big campaign. I don't think that there was anything on TV about it. Not that I remember. It was more about word of mouth really' (Stacy, 2010).

Stacy went to see *Black Joy* with a large group of male friends from college. As ‘social science students’ who were sympathetic to what he termed as, ‘the Black Marxist cause’, he stated that he and his peers ‘cast a strong critical eye’ as they watched the film (Stacy, 2010). Michael saw the film alone in Brixton’s ACE cinema on ‘the first day that it was shown’ (Michael, 2010). Whilst Michael may not use the overt political language of Stacy, as will be shown, notions of representation and authenticity are nevertheless implicit in his interview.

It is important to point out that these data can only provide what Bodroghkozy insightfully describes as, ‘pieces of the past, clues and traces’ (2003, p.134). Two interviewees cannot be seen as ‘representative’ of Brixton’s black communities, and indeed, any participants who respond to an advert must be regarded as being ‘particularly motivated’ (Bodroghkozy, 2003, p.134). Furthermore, I was asking both men for their recollections of a film that they had watched some thirty-three years previously. As Berkhofer has argued, memories are often temporally unreliable and therefore problematic ‘sources’ for the historian (2008, p.43).

However, Luisa Passerini has argued that oral data should be approached on the premise that they are primarily an ‘expression and representation of culture’ (cited in Green and Troup, 1999, p.232). In other words, occasional ‘factual’ lapses are in themselves important, insofar as they provide clues about personal ideologies and ‘subconscious desires’ that may help to shed light on hitherto hidden histories (Green and Troup, 1999, p.232). Mindful of this approach, I have not sought to find an overarching ‘truth’ in the accounts (if ever there could be such a thing), nor have I attempted to correct any inherent ‘contradictions’. Instead, to follow Annette Kuhn, I have treated the ‘material collected...as discourse, as material for interpretation’ (2002, p.9). In this way, then, the interviews can be seen to provide some important

indications as to the complex and divided responses that *Black Joy* elicited when it was first screened in Brixton.

Memory-mapping Brixton

As Annette Kuhn has shown, cinema audience members' memories of watching films generally have, as their starting point, the *location* in which they saw a particular movie (2002, p.17). Kuhn describes this recollection of the physical cinema space (and its close environs) as 'place memory' and goes on to state that: 'While every informant 'does' place-memory in his or her own way, an overall sense emerges ... of a navigation of psycho-geographies and mental topographies of familiar remembered territory' (2002, p.17).

Kuhn was interested in the way in which her participants were able to provide (sometimes at a distance of sixty years from the event) 'discursive memory maps of the parts of town, the neighbourhoods or the suburbs where they went to the pictures' (2002, p.18). Memories, suggests Kuhn, are 'at once emplaced and embodied' (2002, p.17). Indeed, as Kuhn's use of the term 'psycho-geographies' perhaps implies, 'memory-mapping' is necessarily subjective; in short, recollections of physical typography become inextricably linked to the individual's personal, cultural and socio-political memories (2002, p.17). It is possible to suggest that, in the case of *Black Joy*'s reception by black audiences in Brixton, this process of embodied 'memory-mapping' becomes highly intensified for two (interconnected) reasons. I will now explore the first reason for such an intensification. Arguably, this is bound up with the notion that *Black Joy*'s Brixton audiences were watching a film which had been shot in Brixton *itself*. Put simply, the urban landscape (and, indeed, some people in the street) with which audience members were intimately

familiar, were now being projected on the screen of their local cinema as entertainment.

Anthony Simmons' commitment to a documentary-realist mode of filmmaking allied to cinematographer Philip Meheux's previous experiences of working on documentaries for the BBC, meant that both men were wedded to the idea of filming even the most recondite areas of Brixton (Simmons, 2013: Williams, 1995, p.34). Indeed, the crew filmed over seventy locations in Brixton (Summers, 1977, p.15). Whilst Simmons' complex reasons for wanting to make a film in Brixton are outlined in the previous chapter, in interview, he pointed out that one of the attractions of Brixton as a location was that it had been 'untouched' by other directors: '[at that time] you just drive through Brixton ... it didn't exist [for filmmakers]' (Simmons, 2013). Simmons recalled his sheer delight at finding (and filming) previously 'hidden' locations such as the graffiti-covered corrugated-iron fence that ran the length of the semi-derelict Villa Road: 'As a director-writer, you look for opportunities [in location-filming] ... we were looking at all [these] wonderful wallscapes where they had painted all these vibrant paintings' (Simmons, 2013).

Relatively little has been written about the impact on audience members of watching a feature film that, as respondent Michael put it, was 'filmed *and* shown right on our doorstep' (Michael, 2010). One interesting example can be found in Toulmin and Loiperdinger's research, which is concerned with audience responses to the Mitchell and Kenyon 'local' films of the early twentieth century (2005, p.8). Toulmin and Loiperdinger's work is useful here insofar as it can provide some insights into the

complexities of audiences watching ‘themselves’ and their lived environment on the screen. However, it is necessary to point out that there are limitations to using their research in relation to *Black Joy*’s local audiences. In many respects, of course, it is impossible to regard the experiences of late twentieth century film audiences as being analogous to those of the early twentieth century. For audiences of Mitchell and Kenyon’s films, cinema was primarily a novelty and a spectacle, a fairground attraction, and was perhaps understood in these terms. By contrast, late twentieth century audiences, well-versed in film’s visual and verbal language, necessarily overlay their cinematic viewing with detailed and sophisticated knowledge. In this way, Michael and Stacy make repeated references to various films and different genres (most notably blaxploitation). Arguably, it is this very understanding of cinematic tropes that contributes heavily to both men’s implied perception of a disjunction between the verbal and the visual in *Black Joy*. Whilst necessarily mindful of such cultural and temporal differences, it is, nevertheless, possible to argue that useful insights can be gleaned from Toulmin and Loiperdinger’s work. Their observations about the process of audience reflexivity inherent in ‘local’ film encounters are particularly helpful when considering *Black Joy*’s Brixton audiences:

The enigmatic presence of the audience ... [is] acutely felt ... in local films ... Important in this context is the *local audience’s recognition of itself*. The audiences attending the projection of local films were clearly aware that they were both the *subject* and *object* of the show [my emphasis] (Toulmin and Loiperdinger, 2005, p.16).

Importantly, Toulmin and Loiperdinger point out that the ‘local audience’s recognition’ is not only of ‘itself’ but also for the images of ‘local scenes ... factories and workshops’ that form the backdrop of the films (Toulmin and Loiperdinger, 2005, p.8). Like the human beings in Mitchell and Kenyon’s films, then, the local topography is also both the *subject* and *object* of the show (2005, p.8). In this way,

Toulmin and Loiperdinger perhaps elucidate the dizzying strangeness of such filmic encounters for their ‘local’ audiences. To borrow a term from Paul Gilroy, here we can see a dynamic ‘double-articulation’; simultaneously, film is placed in the community and the community is placed in the film. Toulmin and Loiperdinger’s work, then, can go some way towards highlighting the reflexive complexities for audiences who recognise themselves and their lived environment on the screen; they document mixed responses to the films, from the pleasure of recognition to downright hostility at the invasion of privacy (2005, p8, p.10). Arguably, these notions of heightened audience reflexivity, ‘double-articulation’, the pleasures of recognition and identification with places filmed, and concerns about voyeuristic and invasive representation, are highly useful when considering local audiences’ responses to *Black Joy*.

As I posited earlier, the intensification of the ‘embodied memory-mapping’ process on the part of *Black Joy*’s local black audiences is twofold. I will now go on to examine the second reason for this intensification. Crucially, issues of space and place were themselves highly problematised for Brixton’s black communities throughout the 1970s. As the previous three chapters of the thesis have demonstrated, Brixton itself was a racially-contested space which was routinely described from both the outside and the inside as a ‘ghetto’. Indeed, Brixton during this period might be described, to use James Clifford’s phrase, as ‘a policed and transgressive intercultural frontier’ (1997, p.7). Certainly, struggles for space and community were at the heart of black lived experience at this time. Sarita Malik has argued that notions of representation and ‘authenticity’ take on an especial urgency for minority audiences (2002, pp.2-5). As Stacy and Michael seamlessly weave

their own autobiographical recollections of living in a racially-hostile Brixton, into their respective discussions about *Black Joy*, they are reflexively rehearsing ideas of representation, black authenticity, and the pleasures (and traumas) of recognition of place. I will now go on to explore Stacy and Michael's responses to watching *Black Joy* in Brixton.

A key theme discussed by Stacy and Michael either explicitly or implicitly, was the question of *Black Joy*'s 'black authenticity'. As Stacy told me at the beginning of our interview, 'when you are seeing *yourself* on the screen...you expect that real... authenticity' (2010). Although Michael did not actually use the term 'black authenticity', a close reading of his interview transcript suggests that this notion was at the forefront of his mind. Michael intimated that one of *Black Joy*'s functions was to show what he termed as, 'Brixton's history' on the cinema screen:

[*Black Joy*] was portraying what people were coming into when they leave Jamaica or wherever. They come over here [to Brixton] and they had this struggle of finding a room and finding a job and things like that (Michael, 2010).

In the same way, Stacy revealed that he had initially felt that *Black Joy* presented an opportunity to portray the harsh realities of life in Brixton on the screen:

[When *Black Joy* was made] that was the time of Sus laws. Sus was still in operation then. My brother's a priest. He got sussed. Priest? Oh maybe [the police thought] he was going to beat somebody to death with his bible or something. He got arrested, he got charged (Stacy, 2010).

It is, however important to note at this stage that Michael and Stacy seek out 'black authenticity' in *Black Joy* in different ways. As will be shown, Michael primarily looks for this attribute in terms of *Black Joy*'s locations, *mise-en-scène* and costume design, whereas Stacy chooses to focus his discussion of 'black authenticity' on the film's plot and characters.

Location, *mise-en-scène* and costume in *Black Joy*

As previously mentioned, Simmons' and Meheux's respective backgrounds meant that both men were firmly committed to a documentary realist mode of articulation in filmmaking. It is notable that Tony Rayns, writing for *Time Out*, commented that the 'location photography' in *Black Joy* was 'particularly good' (1977, p.33).

Likewise, *Race Today*'s Akua Rugg, whilst generally critical of *Black Joy*, praised 'the documentary style used in the ... the film'. She argued that *Black Joy*'s cinematography provided a convincing portrayal of 'the drab physical environment of a decaying inner city area' (1978, p.13). 'The location on the screen' is something of an absent presence for Stacy. Michael, on the other hand, placed great emphasis on the fact that Brixton was filmed with what he perceived to be a high degree of accuracy. A keen and knowledgeable fan of cinema, Michael was well aware that film locations are generally manipulated by set designers to some degree. Indeed, as Laurie Ede argues:

Realism is never that easy ... film representation involves making creative choices which are appropriate to the story, character and perhaps the point being made ... this means that realistic sets are not always what they appear to be (2010, p.4).

It is a testament to *Black Joy*'s achievement of documentary realism, that Michael was of the firm impression that the locations were not tampered with in any way during the shooting of the film: 'The locations [in *Black Joy*] are as it is. As you see it is like it is. It's not like when they build it up and they put this here or that there to make it look different. It is exactly how it was' (Michael, 2010). For Michael, Brixton's topography was shown 'exactly how it was'; indeed, in interview, he identified many of the locations that had been used in the film. In this way, he talked about the location for the scene in which the newly-arrived Benjamin walks through

an urban wasteland which contains derelict houses and is bounded by a grey corrugated iron fence: ‘In them days, they called it bombsites, that was Somerleyton Road’ (Michael, 2010). Later, returning to the theme of Somerleyton Road, he explained that this was where his older ‘brother had live[d]’ (Michael, 2010). For Michael, then, the location filming was one of the ‘authentic’ aspects of *Black Joy*. He described with satisfaction the way in which the viewer followed Benjamin through ‘Brixton Market and Coldharbour Lane and all the surrounding areas, [the] surrounding backstreets’ (Michael, 2010). Michael lived in Coldharbour Lane at this time and recalled that he had enjoyed the spectacle of the hapless Benjamin stumbling upon his own familiar Brixton haunts: ‘And [Benjamin was] going through the market area, you know, Electric Avenue ... and the barber’s shop and things like that ... you can relate to it’ (Michael, 2010). Michael’s ‘story’ about watching *Black Joy* and his descriptions of the locations in the film are, then, peppered with details both of his own personal memories of life in Brixton in the late 1970s and with broader notions of what it meant to be a young black man living in the community at this time. Evidently, Michael’s recognition of place and his personal identification with the locations depicted in *Black Joy*, constituted key pleasures when he watched the film. This is not to suggest, however, that all of Michael’s recollections about the locations used in *Black Joy* were necessarily comfortable ones. For example, Michael stated that when ‘the old [Brixton] ... Job Centre’ was shown in *Black Joy*, both the interior and exterior of the building were filmed ‘as it was’ (Michael, 2010). Describing the Job Centre as it appeared in the film, led Michael to recall that being black and living in Brixton meant that he suffered serious discrimination in the job market:

It was a racial thing ... The history of Brixton and the stigma of Brixton ... I remember I left school [in 1973] and I went to get a job and immediately I told them that I was living in

Brixton, I couldn't get a job. You couldn't get a job because you came from Brixton ... As long as you came from Brixton, oh my gosh. It [the stigma] was terrible (Michael, 2010).

In his interview, Michael described the way in which 1970s Brixton was a hub for black migrants. He was pleased that *Black Joy* did not shy away from showing their often-impooverished housing conditions. He commented that as a young man, he was aware of 'five people sleeping to one room' and that the *mise-en-scène* used to depict Dave's 'grotty' bedsit was actually quite accurate (Michael, 2010). Furthermore, he asserted approvingly that Benjamin was dressed 'exactly the way you would dress if you had come from overseas with nothing' (Michael, 2010). Michael remembered seeing newly-arrived migrants to Brixton clutching a cardboard suitcase and wearing, like Benjamin, 'the second-hand jacket, the second-hand trousers' (Michael, 2010). He noted too that in the film Benjamin was taken by Dave to a shop called 'Casanova's' in Brixton, where he purchased some new clothing. Again, this was seen by Michael to be 'right' (Michael, 2010). This is an interesting observation, given Simmons' assertion in interview that prior to filming Pixie Weir, *Black Joy's* costume designer, spent a period of some weeks 'just walking around Brixton and looking at people' (Simmons, 2013).

Plot and character in *Black Joy*

As previously mentioned, Stacy's account of watching *Black Joy* strongly privileges the film's plot and characters. As feature films depicting the black experience in Britain were so rare in 1977, Stacy recalled that he and his college friends all felt that it was imperative that *Black Joy* would 'represent [us] one hundred per cent' (Stacy, 2010). Perhaps for this reason, the juvenile characters in the film were singled out

for particular scrutiny. Stacy remembered that he and his group of peers found the character of the small boy, Devon, especially problematic:

That little boy was just ridiculous...he was just so loud and bad mouthed. And all of us were like 'if I ever ...spoke to my father like that what would he have done?' I wouldn't imagine it because my father would just kill me ...My father's like old-school. We say old-school bush. Very patriarchal...so we couldn't relate to that (Stacy, 2010).

As I argued in part 3.3, Devon is a 'knowing child' who is privy to the murky secrets of the adult world. Numerous scenes in *Black Joy* illustrate this, not least Devon's attempt to act as a pimp for his sister Saffra, and his nascent career as a hustler. But a further example of Devon behaving in the way that Stacy and his peers 'couldn't relate to', can be seen early on in the film. Here, Devon is shown with his ear against the door of his mother Miriam's bedroom. Devon listens intently as Miriam rejects Dave's sexual advances and argues with him about her unwanted pregnancy. When Dave finally realises that Devon is 'spying', he does make some attempt to confront the child. Nonetheless, Devon (as ever) ultimately goes unpunished for both his intrusion into the adults' privacy and the disrespect that he shows to Dave after he has been caught. Given Stacy's comments about the level of deference that children within his community were expected to show to adults, it is useful to consider the way in which Devon responds after Dave enquires as to why he has been listening at the door:

Devon: Everybody saying they think you are good at *doing it* with your banana

Dave: That's filthy

Devon: If it's filthy, why are you doing it?

[scene ends]

Interestingly, the notion of Devon as an 'inauthentic' character was also touched on in my conversation with Michael and Paulette. Although neither commented on Devon's behaviour, both were puzzled as to why a boy 'who would have been born

here' should present with a 'strong Jamaican accent' (Michael, 2010). Michael nodded vigorously as Paulette stated that, 'they should have made him [Devon] speak normally'. It is notable also, that Devon is the one character who Michael does not discuss within the context of Brixton's topography, or in terms of the clothing that he wears. Michael effectively removes Devon from the local landscape; this perhaps goes some way to illustrating his discomfiture about a character who simply does not fit. That Michael and Stacy were highly uncomfortable with the representation of Devon is unsurprising in the light of Anthony Simmons' disclosure (discussed in part 3.3) that he added the character to the script (Simmons, 2013). For Simmons, Devon performs an instrumental role in *Black Joy* - he is there to show the audience around Brixton (Simmons, 2013). In this way, it is possible to argue that the inclusion of this particular character actively invites a voyeuristic gaze for white cinema audiences; one which is, at the same time, deeply alienating for black audiences.

Stacy also identified Saffra (Dawn Hope) as being 'inauthentic' and, during the interview, he spoke at length about this character. He focussed his discussion around what he regarded as the film's 'highly unrealistic' portrayal of a sexually active and 'available' young black woman (Stacy, 2010). Saffra's flirtatious and teasing behaviour is illustrated in a scene in *Black Joy* in which she and the small-time hustler, Jomo (who is much older than Saffra) dance together at a nightclub. As they smooch closely to the soul-track, *Lady Marmalade*, Jomo offers to set Saffra up as his mistress. The camera gives a close-up of Saffra's face; she smiles up at Jomo invitingly. Jomo, encouraged by what he sees as Saffra's assent to his proposal, whispers to her:

Jomo: You want to come round to my place for breakfast?

Saffra [dancing closely with Jomo and smiling at him]: Mmm.

Jomo: Cool, dig, then I'll take you home.

Saffra [leaning in as if to kiss Jomo]: No me Grandaddy gave me money for the taxi!

That Saffra, a young 'second generation' black woman, living in Brixton, would have the freedom to behave in such a sexually provocative manner was incomprehensible to Stacey. In interview, he outlined why this was the case:

At that time ... in London [we were] not like the brothers in Liverpool who were four or five generations, so our parents were really strict on us, especially for daughters. Basically, going out with a black girl or getting black girls to hang out was an issue ... The sisters were tightly controlled, out of bounds...their parents were strict...You know like first generation Italians...a girl's not to be seen in the street with any male who's not your cousin or brother. So in the cinema where did they get that girl? (Stacy, 2010).

As Stacy explained, the young black men and women in his class at college went to see *Black Joy* in separate gender groups; there was little opportunity for mixing of the sexes socially, unless it was in the context of education or a family occasion. Saffra's active pursuit of Benjamin and her flirtation with Jomo would certainly go against these social norms.

In a scene at the beginning of *Black Joy*, the highly-predatory Saffra makes it clear to the innocent country-boy, Benjamin, that she is both sexually experienced and available. As Benjamin drinks tea in Miriam's café, Saffra deliberately brushes past him and casts an inviting look over her shoulder. 'You been sticking to me like a fly to a sweet pea!' she murmurs to the bewildered Benjamin. It was perhaps scenes such as this that were perceived to be incongruous and ultimately upsetting to Stacy and his peers. Certainly, in interview, Stacy recalled there was much subsequent discussion about *Black Joy* at college, and that the female students who had seen the film were deeply insulted by Saffra: 'They were saying 'what kind of girl carries on

like that?’ ... The sisters ... they were saying ‘that skanky girl’ (Stacy, 2010).

Unlike Michael, for Stacy and his peers the representation of black lived experience in *Black Joy* was so ‘inauthentic’ that they (erroneously) assumed that ‘it was written by a white guy’ and was ‘his fantasy of how we would behave’ (Stacy, 2010). *Black Joy*, Stacy said, ‘didn’t represent us at all and left us with a bad, bad, feeling’ (Stacy, 2010). Even the film’s name added to Stacy’s feelings of alienation as he and his friends left the cinema: ‘I remember coming out of [*Black Joy*] and feeling anything but joy after seeing that. It [the title] was that kind of bad taste ... I just wondered, who was this film for?’ (Stacy, 2010).

***Black Joy* and blaxploitation**

As mentioned in part 3.3, Jamal Ali had expressed serious concerns that the film was increasingly taking on the attributes of a ‘blaxploitation movie’ (Ali, 2008).

Significantly, both Michael and Stacy discussed *Black Joy* in the light of blaxploitation films. Blaxploitation films, with their throbbing soul-soundtracks, sharp-dressed black ‘super-males’, ‘foxy’ women, and fast-paced action sequences, provided escapist pleasure for certain niche audiences throughout the 1970s. Indeed, Donald Bogle has argued that this genre of films, whilst not unproblematic in terms of representation, gave audiences black cinematic ‘heroes’ for the first time (1989, p.239). Certainly the ACE, with its highly targeted marketing strategy, showed a range of blaxploitation movies in the late 1970s including *Shaft* (Parks, 1971) and *Cleopatra Jones* (Starrett, 1973) (ACE Cinema Advert, 1978, p.14). However, the overlaying of a film about Brixton’s black community with cinematic tropes more commonly found in American blaxploitation films, evidently struck a jarring chord with Michael and Stacy. Both men identified certain aspects of *Black Joy* that drew

heavily on the blaxploitation genre. These elements included the aforementioned voracious sexuality of the characters, certain ‘spectacular’ performance styles and costumes, and *Black Joy*’s soul-music soundtrack.

During his interview, Michael talked about the wider community response to *Black Joy* when it was first shown in Brixton: ‘A lot of people ... thought, ‘oh no, they’ve done it again’ [when they saw *Black Joy*]. Like they used to do with American films, all about gangsters and guns and drugs and prostitution and things like that’ (Michael, 2010). Although Michael was quick to point out that this had not been his personal view, his transcript reveals that he did perceive ‘slippages’ in the representation of black Brixton in the film. Here, as earlier, he directs his observations about the ‘authentic’ and the ‘inauthentic’ elements of *Black Joy* towards the actors’ costumes. Michael was critical about the clothing worn by the black prostitute who Dave King beds at the beginning of the film (and who, significantly, is shown on the film’s poster):

I think she overdid it a bit [laughs]. I’m talking about the way she dressed. It was too loud. Her dress was too loud because basically they didn’t do that in those days. I know that ... The sort of clothes she had on were so loud you could have lit up Buckingham Palace! (Michael, 2010).

In the same way, although Michael deeply admired the actor Norman Beaton and even recalled drinking with him in Brixton pubs on a couple of occasions, he was uneasy with the way that Beaton dressed as the character, Dave King. Although he does not explicitly say it, Michael seems to be comparing King’s costume to those sported by blaxploitation heroes: ‘Norman Beaton, he was dressed like a pimp. But he wasn’t a pimp’ (Michael, 2010). Whilst Michael ostensibly directs his criticisms towards the costumes, I would argue that his discomfiture is actually centred around

the incongruous inclusion of ‘spectacular’ character-types more generally found in blaxploitation, namely the pimp and the prostitute.

In addition to Stacy’s criticisms about inauthentic characterisation, he argued that the film’s soul soundtrack also drew heavily on the blaxploitation genre: ‘[*Black Joy* was] carrying that blaxploitation thing by having this soulful heartbeat to a film, whereas people in real life [in Brixton] are going to feel much closer to reggae’ (Stacy, 2010). As Stacy went on to explain, for young black people in Britain in the 1970s, reggae music was both politically and socially important (Stacy, 2010). Indeed it is worth remembering that, for Stacy, it is *Babylon*’s accurate portrayal of dub-reggae ‘sound systems’ and ‘blues dances’ that helps him to position this particular film as ‘authentic’ (see part 2.4). As Stacy pointed out, it was reggae rather than soul that provided what he termed the politically ‘serious’ sound of black London during this period:

Soul music was happy-go-lucky and reggae was serious. Dry and beat and it was serious ... [we] were quite hostile to the soul scene. It wasn’t until hip-hop came round that it [soul] got its edge back as being hard, as dealing with real stuff (Stacy, 2010).

Stacy singled out the scene early on in *Black Joy*, in which a newly ‘sharply-dressed’ Benjamin dances to soul music at a Brixton blues club. Even at a distance of over thirty years, the memory of this particular ‘inauthentic’ aspect of the film made Stacy really angry:

Jamaica, that music [reggae], that scene, that way of talking ... that wasn’t there at all in *Black Joy* ... that was something at the time that we must have mentioned. Why is this a soul track? And in the club that he [Benjamin] goes to, which is a trip because he’s fresh off the boat and getting down to soul music. No! No! (Stacy, 2010).

Stacy then went on to argue that *Black Joy* was the result of a deliberate and cynical attempt to ‘cash in’ on the popularity of the blaxploitation genre. He surmised that

the makers of the film had seen Brixton as a location that would enable them to ‘get some mileage out of black culture ... because of the Caribbean diaspora [in Brixton]’ (Stacy, 2010). He stated that this was replicating what other film-makers had ‘done in the States’ in the 1970s (Stacy, 2010). *Black Joy* was, he said, ‘like poverty pimping’ - a sleazy and voyeuristic trawl through ghetto life for the delectation of white audiences (Stacy, 2010).

Black Joy and The Harder They Come

In their interviews, Michael and Stacy also compared *Black Joy* to the Jamaican film *The Harder They Come* (Henzell, 1972). They both recalled seeing *The Harder They Come* in the cinema around the same time that *Black Joy* was released.

Listings for Brixton’s ACE show that *The Harder They Come* was the second film to be exhibited, following *Black Joy*, in the venue’s opening week (‘Local cinemas’, 1977, p.49). *The Harder They Come* had a very limited UK distribution when it was first released in 1972 (Smith, 1977, p.20). It was not until April 1977, when the film was re-released, that it was widely shown in London cinemas (Smith, 1977, p.20). Indeed, a trawl through the cinema adverts in the *South London Press* for the period 1977 – 1980 indicates that *The Harder They Come* played regularly in cinemas in the Brixton/Streatham/Tooting areas and was something of a staple at the ACE, where it was sometimes shown as half of a double bill.

The Harder They Come tells the story of an impoverished Jamaican ‘country boy’, Ivan (played Jimmy Cliff), as he searches for work in the city. After suffering numerous privations, he eventually becomes a successful reggae singer only to be swindled by a recording magnate (Clarke, 1972, p.325). Disillusioned and desperate

for money, Ivan begins selling marijuana. Hereafter, Ivan finds himself living the life of a violent criminal ‘outlaw’ who eventually dies in a hail of police bullets (Clarke, 1972, p.235). Stacy asserted that *The Harder They Come* was a much more ‘authentic’ and ‘sincerely felt’ film than *Black Joy*. Interestingly, he suggested that the underlying message of both films was that of the thwarted ‘immigrant dream’ (Stacy, 2010). Nevertheless, Stacy argued that whereas *Black Joy* was a patronising ‘white fantasy’, *The Harder They Come* provided a useful political insight into notions of class and poverty. Monty Smith, writing for *New Musical Express*, in April 1977, also noted the political aspect of the film (1977, p.20). *The Harder They Come*, he wrote, contained ‘an uncompromising critique of national and private corruption’; unfettered capitalism had infiltrated all areas of Jamaican public and private life, and within this blighted system, it was the poor people who suffered the most (Smith, 1977, p.20). Given Michael’s recollections of his personal experiences of ‘local’ unemployment, poverty and ‘stigma’, it is perhaps unsurprising that such a message would resonate with black audiences in Brixton.

Stacy’s earlier comments that *Black Joy* was a pseudo-blaxploitation movie illustrate that he perceived *Black Joy* to be a highly mediated ‘commodity’ which had been cynically produced to satisfy a particular market. He contrasted this with *The Harder They Come* which had, he said, been written by ‘a very groovy Jamaican guy’ and that the script ‘wasn’t touched at all’ (Stacy, 2010). In this way, Stacy was able to position *The Harder They Come* as an ‘authentic’ text by dint of its uncontested authorship and consequent implied integrity. That *The Harder They Come* offers a fantasy heroism which is rooted in an exotic ‘mythical’ homeland, rather than the grey streets of Brixton, is implicit in Stacy’s interview; perhaps this

also goes someway in explaining his preference for the film. As I will now go on to show, the notions of ‘fantasy heroism’ and ‘exotic spaces’ are at the forefront of Michael’s account of watching *The Harder They Come*. In his interview, Michael remembered that he saw *The Harder They Come* at the ACE. When he compared *Black Joy* to *The Harder They Come*, he made it clear that he preferred the latter film:

Black Joy came out and it wasn’t as strong, it wasn’t as enjoyable, I mean I found it quite a funny film but...[*The Harder They Come*]...came out first and then you see *Black Joy*. The strength of the film wasn’t as strong (Micheal, 2010).

When I asked Michael what it was about *The Harder They Come* that made it ‘stronger’ than *Black Joy*, he provided two explanations. Firstly, Michael recalled that he had derived much pleasure from watching the performance of the reggae star Jimmy Cliff. Michael was a huge fan of Jimmy Cliff and seeing him on the big screen was, he said, ‘tops for me’ (Michael, 2010). Given Stacy’s earlier comments about the centrality of reggae to British black youth culture in the 1970s, it is worth reflecting on the contrast between the soundtracks of the respective films. *Black Joy* offered its audiences what Stacy termed as ‘happy-go-lucky’ soul; the soundtrack to *The Harder They Come* consisted entirely of Jamaican reggae, replete with messages of oppression and ultimate resistance. As Monty Smith wrote in his review of *The Harder They Come* in *New Musical Express*:

Superbly integrated within the whole [film] is the authentic reggae score (Toots and The Maytals, Slickers, Melodians and, of course, [Jimmy] Cliff), beginning with the emblematic ‘You Can Get It If You Really Want’ over the opening credits ... ‘*Oppressors trying to keep me down/Make me feel like a clown*’ sings Ivan (Jimmy Cliff). ‘*The harder they come, the harder they fall/One and all*’ ... [Jimmy Cliff is] resplendent in a leopard-skin shirt and motorbike shades ... [emphasis in original] (Smith, 1977, p.20).

In contrast to *Black Joy*'s naïve and clodhopping 'country-boy', Benjamin, *The Harder They Come*'s Ivan, with his beautiful singing voice, good looks and defiant 'rude-boy' sensibilities, offered Brixton's black audiences a glamorous, exotic and transgressive role-model.

The second explanation that Michael gave for *The Harder They Come* being the 'stronger' film was to do with location. The brightly lit sky, sea and sands depicted in *The Harder They Come* contrast dramatically with the grey and gloomy Brixton of *Black Joy*. In this way, Michael suggested that *Black Joy*'s Brixton film locations simply could not match up to the 'exotic spaces' captured in *The Harder They Come*:

It's done in your local area so you don't really [get excited]...[*The Harder They Come*] came in from outside our community...Yeah and this one [*Black Joy*] was done right on our doorstep...It hasn't got the *glamour*...Because ...the other films are coming in from overseas...they are coming from Jamaica, so you get that sort of 'wow'! (Michael, 2010).

In her research on her own family history which spanned several continents, Jacqueline Nassy Brown has written about the 'racialized geography of the imagination' whereby 'second generation' children negotiate the imagined land of their parents with their own immediate geographical reality (2009, p.209). Interestingly, for Michael, this process seems to have taken place in the cinema. Viewing *The Harder They Come* and other foreign films in the ACE perhaps provided Michael with a 'zone of contact' whereby he could negotiate and visually explore glamorous 'imagined spaces'.

Despite Michael's preference for *The Harder They Come*, he was at pains to state that he had enjoyed 'being a part of *Black Joy*' and that he had liked the film when

he saw it in the cinema. His interview is interspersed with adjectives such as ‘funny’, and ‘humorous’ which he uses frequently when describing *Black Joy*.

Unlike Stacy, Michael did not feel insulted by the portrayal of Brixton life in the film. Seemingly, for him, the ‘inauthentic’ elements of the film were far outweighed by the ‘authentic’. For Michael then, *Black Joy* authentically depicted ‘untouched’ Brixton locations, the shabby clothes of the ‘country boy’, and the impoverished living conditions of black migrants to Brixton. Perhaps it was this sense of recognition that ultimately enabled him to view the film as amusing:

[*Black Joy*] showed an image of Brixton, but I think a mild side of Brixton. It wasn’t as strong as some people made it out to be ... I mean they did portray a lot of bad things about Brixton, but it was mild ... It showed a part of Brixton, what Brixton really is ... It was very humorous (Michael, 2010).

By contrast, Stacy recalled that the only time he laughed was when he and his friends shouted out comments in the cinema as *Black Joy* was playing:

The funny bit, the actually laughing bit, most of the jokes, I remember in the cinema...came from the [comments of the] audience. Your boy would overhear, you would shout out something and people would laugh at *that*... When you are shouting out something you are saying something *real*... You talk back to the screen man, it’s like being on the show. You have something to say. You holler back [original emphasis] (Stacy, 2010).

For Stacy and his friends, ‘hollering back at the screen’ was perhaps a way of negating the ‘inauthentic’ characterisations and images that ‘did not represent’ them. By ‘talking back’, the young men were able to utilize the cinema space to become part of ‘the show’. In this way, they were able to resituate the film within their own ‘authentic’ narrative: ‘We were shouting out: ‘If that was my child I would slap him’. Talking about the little boy [Devon]’ (Stacy, 2010).

Conclusion

In its simplest terms, *Black Joy* is the tale of a Guyanese country boy's migration to Brixton and, as Paul Gilroy notes, 'narrative[s] of loss, exile and journeying ... serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the [diasporic] group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory' (1993, p.198). For Gilroy, these narratives serve to 'invent, maintain and renew identity' (1993, p.198). That Stacy and other black audience members sought to overlay *Black Joy* with what they perceived as an authentic narrative of the black diasporic experience is, then, revealing. Seemingly, for Stacy and others, it was imperative that *Black Joy* was immediately 'rewritten' in the cinema space *itself*. 'Hollering' at the screen perhaps allowed for a re-directing of the film's narrative towards an 'authentic' 'common history and social memory'; one which more fully recognised the socio-political complexities of life for Brixton's black 'second generation'. Significantly, Stacy did not deem a 'rewriting' to be necessary for the already 'authentic' *The Harder They Come* (Stacy, 2010).

Michael, on the other hand, appears to be largely content with the way in which black Brixton is portrayed in *Black Joy*. It is, of course, important not to lose sight of the 'inauthentic slippages' that Michael identifies within the film's narrative; the blaxploitation costumes worn by two of the characters and Devon's 'fake' Jamaican accent, are singled out by him for criticism. However, unlike Stacy, it is evident that Michael did not regard *Black Joy*'s depiction of black lived experience as being especially problematic. Location, whilst something of an absent presence in Stacy's transcript, is at the forefront of Michael's narrative about *Black Joy*. Michael makes numerous references to Brixton's cultural geography, and his memories of seeing

Brixton on the cinema screen often meld seamlessly with reflections about his own life in the area. In this way, Michael seemingly uses *Black Joy* to position himself firmly within Brixton's history; it is notable how often he qualifies his comments about a particular aspect of Brixton's topography with the statement, 'I was there, I know' (Michael, 2010). Furthermore, Michael is greatly concerned with the clothes that *Black Joy*'s characters wear. He talks at some length about the authenticity of Benjamin's 'country boy' costume and happily reminisces about a Brixton clothing store, which features in the film. Unlike Stacy, he does not refer to the music in the film, and he makes little mention of *Black Joy*'s plot (other than to describe the film as 'funny'). When Michael discusses a character, it is generally in relation to their clothing or to their physical environment (as when he describes Benjamin's chase through Brixton's backstreets). Michael's reading of *Black Joy* then, appears to be strongly bound up with the film's visual aesthetics, and it is perhaps this which ultimately enables him to implicitly posit *Black Joy* as an 'authentic' black text.

Michael and Stacy's discussions about *Black Joy*, whilst necessarily limited in terms of sample size, do go some way in encapsulating the multi-faceted and divided responses to the film when it was shown in Brixton. What is interesting about their interviews is that they strongly echo the pattern of fault lines highlighted in the textual analysis of the film explored in part 3.3. Broadly, their responses suggest a disjunction between the visual and the verbal registers. Michael was able to find an authenticity in *Black Joy* by dint of his strong identification with the film's documentary realist style (although he was clearly very uncomfortable with the blaxploitation elements in the film). That Stacy found *Black Joy* to be deeply inauthentic perhaps lies in his reading of the film - it is one which is heavily

concerned with plot and characterisation. For him, the behaviour of characters such as Benjamin, Saffra and Devon bore little resemblance to his own life or that of his peers; *Black Joy*'s depiction of life in Brixton was voyeuristic, insulting and alienating, 'it did not represent us' (Stacy, 2010).

The reception of *Black Joy* at a local level indicates a complex reading of the film, one through which black audiences craved (and sometimes discovered glimpses of) authenticity, but, ultimately found that they could not identify with the joyous and nostalgic Brixton portrayed on the screen. The fact that Brixton's ACE cinema only showed *Black Joy* for one week (and did not hold the film over), is telling, compared with the film's relative longevity in the West End. Can evidence of local hostility to *Black Joy* perhaps be read into its limited Brixton run? Certainly, the aforementioned shunning of Jamal Ali, following the screening of *Black Joy* in Brixton, is revealing in this respect.

As I have outlined in part 2.2 of this thesis, Horace Ové's *Pressure* had its main cinema distribution from around March 1978 onwards, meaning that audiences generally saw it after *Black Joy*. That there was a degree of local animosity towards the 'inauthentic' *Black Joy* is further evidenced by the way in which the ever-savvy ACE chose to advertise *Pressure*. The ACE placed their own small box-advert for their week-long screening of *Pressure* in the *South London Press* on April 14 1978. It read: 'Harsher than *Black Joy* that's *Pressure*' (ACE advert, 1978, p.15). The inference here perhaps, is that compared to the edgy authenticity of *Pressure*, *Black Joy* is little more than an apolitical light-hearted 'romp'.

Ultimately, the story of *Black Joy*'s Brixton reception is multi-layered. It reveals much about the way in which local audiences used diasporic black connections to rehearse issues of agency, identity and memory, in connection to black migration, within popular cinema. That one audience member could erroneously assert that '*Black Joy* was written by a white guy' illustrates the way in which Jamal Ali's authorial voice was severely weakened by the commercial and creative imperatives of the film-makers. The paradox here is that Ali's personal, political voice which had been forged in radical black theatre, and enhanced by television, was ultimately compromised by a film-maker who, due to his own notions of lost home, wanted Brixton to represent something other than the reality of black struggle. Arguably, Stacy and Michael reclaim 'their own Brixton' in *Black Joy*, but this is achieved through a sometimes painful process of (re)negotiation with their personal histories as seen through the prism of cinema going in the life of Brixton in the 1970s. As the complex story of *Black Joy*'s screening in Brixton illustrates, 'bringing it all back home' is a risky strategy when diasporic notions of what home *is* are already socially and politically contested.

Following his painful experience with *Black Joy*, Jamal Ali returned to work in radical black theatre, and he also toured the UK with solo live poetry shows (Ali, 2012). In interview, Ali stated that by working with London-based theatre companies such as Temba and The Black Theatre Co-operative, and in performing his poetry, he once again regained his authorial voice and artistic integrity (Ali, 2012). However, he recalled that it took some years for his reputation to recover in Brixton (Ali, 2008). Ali cited his 1988 play *Slipping into Darkness* as the work that fully restored his political credibility with local 'black radicals' (Ali, 2008). Starring

Calvin Simpson and produced by Malcolm Frederick for The Black Theatre Co-operative, *Slipping into Darkness* was a polemical work that called for black solidarity and peace in a riot-scarred and violent Brixton. As Ali explained:

[*Slipping into Darkness*] ... expressed how the community was going. How the people were slipping into darkness, how the violence was happening right in the community, right in Brixton ... it was [this] that I set out in the first place to stop, to stop the violence that was happening (Ali, 2008).

In 1988, *Slipping into Darkness* 'gave 58 performances in 26 different venues' in London, the regions, and the Stage Door Festival, Amsterdam (Frederick and Moore, 1988, p.41). Evidently, the play received a high degree of critical acclaim (Ali, 2008: Frederick and Moore, 1988, p.41). It is interesting to consider that with *Slipping into Darkness*, Ali once again set a play in Brixton; a return to his original intention that radical black theatre should be 'for, by and about' the local community.

PART 4 - CONCLUSION

Summation

In this thesis I have examined fictional film and television programmes concerned with representations of black Britain within the highly contested socio-political arena of 1970s race relations. The thesis has explored a range of creative interventions by black writers, directors and actors and has addressed a series of key questions about the nature of this body of work. One set of questions attends to the conditions whereby such work was produced. Why was black expression and representation the focus of such a broad range of fictional forms in film and television in this period? What were the socio-political, cultural and institutional factors that determined this work? How was it facilitated, shaped, received, understood and contested by different constituencies? These are questions about the contextual determinants of this work. A further set of questions posed by this research explores the nature of black creative agency in this period. Who were the key writers, directors and actors? What was the extent of their collaboration? Why did these particular voices emerge? How did they develop? What were their preoccupations and modes of address? Why was radical black community theatre so important as a seedbed for new writing at this time? What can the study of the fictional film and television work written, directed by or featuring black artists, reveal that documentary cannot? Equally, why did documentary realism remain the dominant mode in black feature film and television plays? What do the rare exceptions to this aesthetic reveal about the negotiation of diasporic identities, the articulation of political oppression and the spaces of self-expression? Part 2 of the thesis examined these issues with reference to a broad range of film and television work produced during the decade, drawing

upon detailed archival research and original interview testimony. In Part 3, these sources and methods informed an extended case study focussing on the career of a single writer, Jamal Ali, building on the contextual determinants in Part 2, and investigating in depth the emergence of an important and neglected voice. I will now summarise my findings and provide answers to the questions raised.

In part 2.1, I described the socio-political conditions under which black creative voices emerged in film and television in the 1970s. I argued that to a large extent, the decade witnessed a dynamic continuum of the racism and privations faced by Britain's black communities which had their roots in slavery, colonialism and the more recent so-called 'Windrush arrivals' of the late 1940s. Moreover, the 1970s was a decade characterised by economic and social turbulence. These challenging socio-economic conditions, when allied with a tacit consensus on the part of both the Conservative and Labour parties that the key to racial harmony was to place heavy controls on (black) immigration, and the subsequent public and private continuing discourse about 'troublesome' minorities, meant that black communities found themselves at a severe disadvantage in the spheres of education, employment, housing and the criminal justice system. As I argued in this section, the decade witnessed the emergence of 'second generation' black youth; a group who were born in the UK and were understandably incensed that they were treated as second class citizens in their own country. Whilst the 1976 Race Relations Act went some way to redress issues of *overt* racial discrimination, the egregious decision to exempt the police from the legislation, meant that in reality, black second generation youths were highly vulnerable to police stop and search activities and brutality – a problem that disproportionately affected them. As the decade progressed, it was this group of young black people (together with some of those who had migrated to Britain in

the 1960s) who became increasingly politicised, and who mobilised together against police brutality, racism and racial discrimination in education, housing and employment. The forging of Black Power-influenced grassroots groups in Britain's cities (especially in London) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, signified not only highly organised black political pressure groups, but also, and importantly, an unprecedented degree of politically-motivated black cultural creative endeavour. In London, various black theatres were set up at grassroots level, primarily as a protest and response to the pressures faced by black communities. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, radical black community theatre provided a crucial platform for black writing, directing and the development of black acting talent. Indeed, as I have argued, Jamal Ali is a pivotal figure, having formed firstly RAPP and then, together with Norman Beaton, the Black Theatre of Brixton. With very few exceptions, many of the black writers and actors who worked in feature film and fictional television during the 1970s had a background (to a greater or lesser extent) in radical black theatre. Indeed, the decade's only black film and television director, Horace Ové, also had connections with black theatre and had directed Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* on stage at Keskids (Chambers, 2011, p.152). One of the central concerns of this thesis has been to examine this correlation between the political and social intensity of the decade and its expression across a range of black cultural production.

In part 2.2, I provided a survey of the significant range of feature films and fictional television programmes concerned with black Britain in the 1970s; the chapter demonstrates that discourses of race were addressed across a surprisingly wide range of middle-brow and popular television texts throughout the decade. Whilst the relationship between socio-political and cultural change is always complex, British

film and television witnessed a number of diverse interventions by black writers, directors and actors during the 1970s which both reflected the prominence and urgency of political discourses concerned with race, and engaged with it in surprisingly complex ways. This section also demonstrated the ways in which informal networks of black (and white and black) practitioners worked across feature film and fictional television during this period, and provided key instances of institutional access. Horace Ové presents a prominent example of a black director/writer who worked extensively in film and television throughout the 1970s; in common with some other black practitioners, Ové gave credit to the work of sympathetic producers such as Peter Ansorge and Graham Benson. However, other key black voices emerge from the survey. The Guyanese playwright, Michael Abbensetts wrote for the BBC and ITV throughout the 1970s and, by dint of his earlier collaborations with Peter Ansorge, penned the ground-breaking black soap opera, *Empire Road*. Again, Abbensetts' ongoing work for theatre during this period should be noted. Barry Reckord, who had previously had plays produced at the Royal Court Theatre, wrote *In the Beautiful Caribbean*, a rare example of a black television play that eschewed the dominant documentary-realist form. Another writer whose aesthetic experimentation broke with these conventions is Jamal Ali, whose work I examined in detail in Part 3. Ali's *Open Door* production, *Black Feet in the Snow* combined Caribbean orature and Brechtian dramaturgy and is the most radical departure from the documentary realist aesthetic witnessed in black television during the decade.

The actor Norman Beaton had key roles in the films *Pressure* and *Black Joy*, and throughout the decade starred in groundbreaking television programmes including *Black Christmas*, the all-black sitcom *The Fosters* and *Empire Road*. In the same

way, Carmen Munroe was an actor whose work spanned numerous television projects at this time, notably *Empire Road*, *The Fosters* and *A Hole in Babylon*. That both Beaton and Munroe acted as mentors to younger stars such as Lenny Henry, is highly important in terms of performance and black creative agency. As Henry recently recalled, it was working on *The Fosters* with Beaton and Munroe that helped him to determine the path of his future career (Khaleeli, 2014, p.23). Other black actors, whose names are perhaps less well-known today, performed in a range of feature films and television programmes. T Bone Wilson, Shope Shodeinde, Shango Baku and Archie Pool, for example, all had backgrounds in radical black theatre (Wilson, Baku and Pool had all worked with Jamal Ali) and this factor perhaps facilitated their raw and authentic performances across a wide range of projects. In short, section 2.2 reveals the high degree of practitioner cross-over in film, theatre and television, both in front of and behind the camera. The survey highlights the complex issues of black authorship, agency, authenticity and expression.

In part 2.3, I used archival evidence to uncover the contemporaneous audience and institutional responses to the controversial but hugely popular sitcom, *Love Thy Neighbour*. I demonstrated the way in which the material from the IBA archive revealed how the programme was open to polysemic readings. The open-ended nature of the sitcom form meant that it enabled audiences to take various positions on the race politics of *Love Thy Neighbour* which were sometimes divorced from the positions taken by the IBA and a series' writer. The *Love Thy Neighbour* correspondence shows to a startling degree, how a popular text was used by audiences to negotiate and contest issues of race during a particularly discordant period in British race relations. This section demonstrated how archival research can

reveal the circulation of complex responses around this situation comedy, and highlighted the insights to be gained from encompassing the range of black cultural production in the period.

By contrast, my second case study (2.4) was concerned with the production history of the feature film *Babylon* and centred on the pivotal role played by its producer, Gavrik Losey. In this section, I argued that it was Losey's work as a mediator and broker which enabled *Babylon* to retain its creative integrity in the face of institutional sensitivity and suspicion. *Babylon* serves as another exemplar (seen throughout this thesis) of the way in which producers could enable black voices to be heard. The case of *Babylon* also demonstrates just how complex the notion of an 'authentic black film' can be. The film had a white producer, director/writer and the crew were also white. Nevertheless, it was critically acclaimed and the film's popularity with black audiences is underlined by new interview testimony and its extended run at Brixton's ACE cinema. What is revealed in the production history of *Babylon* (as unearthed in Losey's papers), is the extent of collaboration between black and white practitioners. We see, for example, the way in which a snowballing technique was used for the recruitment of black extras (and Losey's refusal to bow to Union rules on this matter), and his equally tough stance on the use of patois. Moreover, *Babylon's* production history once again shows the interconnectedness of personnel working in black theatre, film and television during the decade, not least director Franco Rosso's previous collaboration with Horace Ové.

In part 2.5, I reconstructed the production history of *A Hole in Babylon* largely through detailed interviews with its producer, Graham Benson and director, Horace Ové. As with *Babylon*, the production history of this *Play for Today* says much about the facilitative role of certain producers working in feature film and television

in the 1970s. Indeed, it is useful to note here that my research as a whole does not demonstrate that television afforded better opportunities than film in respect of black agency (or vice versa). Rather, in both media, supportive producers were vital enablers who could defend the integrity of black voices. Moreover, in interview, Ové revealed that this help extended to further areas of film and television production. He stated that some of the crew that worked for him on *A Hole in Babylon* were the same ‘liberal white guys’ who had worked for free on *Pressure*.

Like *Pressure* (and *Babylon*), *A Hole in Babylon* had a documentary realist aesthetic; indeed this was the dominant fictional mode in black feature film and television plays in the 1970s. Whilst in part this may be down to pecuniary factors, there seems to be an urgency on the part of filmmakers such as Ové to show black life ‘as it was’. Here, we may want to reflect on the way in which the fictional form could be used to say that which could not be said in the documentary, even as it blurred the boundaries between the forms. Certainly Ové saw *A Hole in Babylon* as a chance to both faithfully reconstruct the events of the Spaghetti House Siege *and* to reclaim the stories of the young black men who had simply been positioned as ‘hooligans’ in the press.

The case studies in Part 2 demonstrated the usefulness of the imaginative interpretation of archival and original interview material in reappraising particular film and television texts. They also highlighted the importance of researching production and reception contexts in understanding the nature of black interventions in the 1970s. In Part 3, using the same methodological approach, I placed the texts themselves at the foreground, which enabled an applied study of creative agency – the creative journey of the poet and playwright Jamal Ali. In part 3.1, I described the way in which Ali’s uncompromising authorial voice was emergent in performance

poetry and honed in radical black theatre. Here we see that Ali's work was strongly wedded to a community context. Ali lived and worked in Brixton and his own biographical experiences, together with those of the young black people in his radical theatre groups RAPP, and the Black Theatre of Brixton, strongly informed his artistic expression. Indeed, it is worth noting that the patois that Ali used in his poetry and plays of the 1970s was 'that of the [Brixton] street – a new language being formed' (Ali, 2008). From the outset, Ali saw his work as being inexorably linked to the political. As I have shown, he had strong links to the nascent British Black Power movement – for Ali, radical black community theatre (and performance poetry) was a means of getting the message 'out there'. Ali's polemical plays were a call to arms and a plea for black mobilisation and solidarity in the face of racism, black socio-political disadvantage, and police brutality. It is useful to consider that Ali described Brixton during this period as a 'ghetto' (and this theme will be returned to below). Certainly, his writing was constantly underpinned by a diasporic longing (and searching) for 'home'. That Brixton was a geographical location under siege (especially in terms of police stop and search activities), informs Ali's work, as do his endeavours to forge a community through his writing and the forming of radical black theatre groups. Funding for community theatre was a constant challenge, although Ali showed considerable pragmatism in this direction. Here it can be suggested that the itinerant nature of Ali's projects perhaps serve as a microcosm of the diasporic experience – it is salutary to consider that the Black Theatre of Brixton eventually found itself without a base in Brixton.

In part 3.2, I described the way in which Ali's stage play, *Black Feet in the Snow* (written for RAPP) was adapted for the BBC *Open Door* strand. The creative collaboration between Ali and the BBC director, Brian Skilton, allowed for an

adaptation that further enhanced the radical intention of the original stage play.

Again, we see an example of the way in which certain white practitioners could act as enablers for black creative agency. In common with producers such as Graham Benson and Peter Ansorge, Brian Skilton was at pains to defend the integrity of Ali's voice. In short, the transformation of Ali's voice from his natural medium of the stage was facilitated by institutional permission and a supportive production team at the BBC. Importantly, *Black Feet in the Snow* (like *In the Beautiful Caribbean*) moved away from the dominant documentary realist aesthetic. The aesthetics of television emphasised the hybridity of *Black Feet in the Snow* – a radical mix of orature and Brechtian elements. The fact that Ali was able to use the original RAPP cast for the television production, further underlines notions of black agency and autonomy (and kept the play's strong community roots). Shango Baku's raw performance as the quiet young man, turned radical firebrand, who eventually leads a riot, says much about the permission given by the fictional form. Ali, then, was 'very happy with the way that the play turned out on the BBC' (Ali, 2008).

In part 3.3, I explored the adaptation of Ali's politically-didactic stage play *Dark Days, Light Nights* for the feature film *Black Joy*. Whereas Ali's experience with BBC *Open Door* had been positive and retained (and indeed enhanced) the radical intentions of the original theatre production, he found that his creative voice was seriously compromised with *Black Joy*. Ali's collaboration with the director Anthony Simmons was problematic from the outset, not least because both men had differing views as to what constituted immigrant life in London in the late 1970s. As we have seen, Ali's artistic vision was firmly wedded to a politicised view of Brixton; one which drew heavily on his own biographical experiences and his sympathies with British Black Power movements. The Jewish Simmons, on the

other hand, regarded Brixton as a location on which his own longings for the vibrant East End home of his youth could be transposed. Both men, then were embattled over their respective yearning for Brixton to be 'home'. Moreover, the film's American producer, Elliott Kastner, appears to have regarded *Black Joy* as a British blaxploitation film. The completed film then, is an uneasy meld of documentary realism, sex comedy and blaxploitation elements. Certainly, the production history of *Black Joy* (in contrast to *Pressure* and *Babylon*) reveals evidence of manipulation in the filmmaking process that transferred creative agency away from Ali. In short, very little of Ali's radical voice is evident in the completed film. Furthermore, Kastner's marketing interventions for the film sought to remove *Black Joy* away from its Brixton community roots. As I outlined in this section, the posters strongly echoed those of American blaxploitation, and Kastner was keen to showcase the film in Cannes and to open *Black Joy* in the West End. Critical responses to the film were polarised; whereas the mainstream press was largely complementary, radical black publications such as *Race Today* and *Flame* were scathing. Indeed, the screening of the film in Brixton was a professional and personal disaster for Ali – members of his local community accused him of 'selling out'.

In part 3.4, I drew on new interview testimony and textual analysis in order to examine the reception history of *Black Joy* in Brixton's ACE cinema. In-depth interviews with two audience members, Stacy and Michael, revealed that the ideological schism between Ali and Simmons (whilst unknown to audiences), was unwittingly reflected in their interpretations of the film. In short, both readings (and my textual analysis) suggest a disjunction between the visual and verbal registers. Stacy found *Black Joy* to be inauthentic and exploitative, and he was especially critical of the depictions of younger characters in the film, not least Devon. Both

Stacy and Michael were deeply uncomfortable with the blaxploitation elements of *Black Joy*. Although Michael enjoyed the film (and was proud that he had been an extra), his account of *Black Joy* tellingly focused on the authentic Brixton location and the film's documentary realism. By dint of this reading, Michael was able to (re)position his own socio-political history within the film itself. Stacy and his group of friends, on the other hand, metaphorically 'rewrote' the film's narrative during the screening; they 'hollered at the screen' when scenes, music and characters were felt to be inauthentic. Both responses then, perhaps say much about the negotiation of a 'problematic' black text by diasporic audiences within a local community setting. The reception history of *Black Joy*, then, reveals much about complex notions of black creative agency and geographical spaces of self-expression. Moreover, Brixton, was also a contested space for Ali; one from which he was, temporarily, alienated by the response to the film. Here we can see the relationship between geographical space/place and black self-expression. This is one of the key themes to emerge from this study, to which I will return below.

Cultural history, the creative process and the significance of London

In broad terms, there have been two dominant models for researching film and television history. In the first place, textual analysis identifies cultural meaning at the level of the text itself, and this literary tradition of cultural analysis tends to position the director as the author of a film. For example, this is the dominant approach taken by Lola Young, in her exploration of key directors' filmic representations of the black experience in 1970s Britain (Young, 1996, p.133). Here, Young's close textual analysis of *Pressure*, *Babylon* and *Black Joy* enables her examination of the

decade's cultural history of 'black female sexuality, gender relations between men and women and the role of black struggle' as reflected in the film texts themselves (1996, p.133). This reflectionist approach to filmic representation has been critiqued by scholars of *The New Film History* (Chapman, Glancy and Harper, 2007). According to this school of thought, a film cannot be regarded as providing any straightforward reflection of historical process, by dint of the complex nature of the medium and its collaborative mode of production. Researching production history can, it is argued, offer a more nuanced account of how creative agency and institutional factors determine the finished text. An analogous emphasis on the insights to be gained by unearthing production and industrial histories and the multi-authorial nature of programme content has arguably become dominant in television history (see Bignell, Lacey and Macmurrough-Kavanagh, 2000, pp.1-10). Certainly, my own study moves beyond text-centred reflectionism and reinforces the fact that there is not a simple correlation between socio-political change and cultural production. Moreover, it offers new, context-specific ways of thinking about that relationship in respect of black cultural production and representation. Thus my study transcends the dichotomy between text and context outlined above. Indeed, in writing a cultural history which seeks to recover the nature of black expression, these dynamic relations, which inform other work, can actually be seen as a false distinction; rather there is a fusion of the two which meet in the creative voice. If this were a text-centred study the results might appear disappointingly fragmented; the texts themselves are variable and uneven. But what my research reveals is that their complexity and cultural importance does not reside at the aesthetic level – they can only be fully understood when they are (re)situated within the socio-political context in which they were produced and received. Textual analysis alone could not

reveal the cultural function that texts performed during a particularly disordered decade in British race relations and their diverse, problematic and contested meanings. In the same way, knowledge of the production history, whilst obviously illuminating, does not explain the complex reception history of certain texts or fully articulate the reasons as to why they are deemed to be ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ by black audiences. Indeed, as I have argued throughout this thesis, it is too simplistic to look at texts purely in terms of black or white authorship, *Black Joy* being a case in point. What is important then, is recovering the creative process rather than focussing on the product itself. In this thesis, I have unearthed the complexities of the creative expression (and reception) of the texts that I have surveyed, and argue that all have (to a lesser or greater extent) their basis in the contested race politics of the decade. This approach reveals how pejorative texts such as *Love Thy Neighbour* can be opened to a more nuanced reading than has previously been documented – one that could not have been provided by textual analysis alone. In the same way, in order to fully understand the significance of *Black Feet in the Snow*, it must be recognised as an expression of Jamal Ali’s highly politicised voice, from his background in performance poetry and radical theatre, *and* within the situation of Brixton’s black community itself. Recovering the process of black creative articulation is, then, the result of a productive fusion of textual and contextual evidence.

Here it is once again important to reflect on the importance of London to black culture and creativity in the 1970s. The dichotomy between text and context is transcended in the recognition of place/space that is apparent in many of the London-based texts that I have surveyed. In this way, London as a location is reflexive of the community out of which it was created. Many of the writers, actors and extras who

worked in film and television during this decade lived in London, and the choice of locations such as Deptford, Ladbroke Grove and Brixton meant that texts were both personally and topographically situated. It is therefore here that text and context are very closely related. In short, creative work that remains close to, and evocative of, its roots is clearly evidenced in the writings of Ali and Ové, for example (see below). However, the personally and politically embedded nature of the texts can also be seen in the reception of the texts. Whilst it is possible to argue that many of the texts that I have explored are flawed or imperfect, they have a high cultural value by dint of their embeddedness in London's black communities and as expressions of time as well as place. Thus my work demonstrates the importance of space and place in cultural production and reception. It highlights the importance of a cultural geographic community-based approach, whilst mindful of textual analysis. In this way, it has demonstrable advantages. It allows one to bring together the analyses of production and reception in an innovative manner, and has the potential to reveal the way in which popular film and television texts work dynamically in the negotiation of black experience and black identity. Importantly then, in my study, production and reception history are both situated *within* and understood by the same community. In focussing on London (and more specifically, Brixton) as a site of black creative expression and reception, I provide a nuanced picture of the way in which marginalised diasporic communities 'find a voice' and of the extent to which this is both enabled and contested. The 'mapping' of production and reception within a community, foregrounds issues of interconnectedness, both in terms of practitioners – here we may want to think of Jamal Ali and Norman Beaton's first encounter in a Brixton betting shop, for example – and in terms of topography. By (re) mapping 1970s Brixton, one not only gets an important sense of the

metaphorical and physical boundaries of the area, but also sites of black creative expression, such as Longfield Hall, the ACE cinema and Villa Road. Interview testimony from Jamal Ali, Stacy and Michael all reveal the way in which location is inextricably linked to cultural memory (and helps to explain why Simmons' imagined 'magical world of Brixton' was so problematic to black audiences).

The nature of the black creative voice

What my study vitally reveals is the complex nature of black expression and articulation itself. This does not reside only in the text but also in the recovery of the creative process from the material history of its text/context. In this way, the notion of the black creative voice emerges as a key element of this thesis. What this thesis uniquely demonstrates is the way in which the black creative voice surfaces under pressure across a range of cultural texts in the 1970s, and that agency is not necessarily located in black authorship in any straightforward way. The black creative voice is changed and shaped by different media and contested in different forms. The nature of this voice then, is complex. It generally has a strongly autobiographical element which also draws on the collective biographical testimony of the community. Practitioners such as Horace Ové, Michael Abbensetts and Jamal Ali, fused their own experiences with those of the broader black community in their writing. This is one way in which the voice is not only singular but collective. Related to this, is the way in which the collective voice is strongly linked both to the political and to geographical space. This can clearly be seen in Ali's work with radical black theatre in Brixton, but it is equally apparent in film and television. Consider Horace Ové's repeated use of Ladbroke Grove as a location, for example, or his casting of actors with links to the Black Power movement, such as T Bone Wilson. The collaborative aspect of the voice is also seen in the informal networks

of actors and practitioners working in black television and film at this time. Here it must again be noted that the voice emerges as a result of collaboration between black and white practitioners (and this can be an enabling or a constraining factor). The collective voice can also be heard in terms of reception (black audiences' 're-writing' of *Black Joy* in Brixton's ACE cinema, for example). Moreover, the voice is often compromised and sometimes censored. An obvious example of compromise can be seen in the example of Jamal Ali and *Black Joy*, but the censoring of the voice also happens in more nuanced ways, such as the limited initial distribution of *Pressure* or the granting of an 'X' certificate to *Babylon*. Importantly, the voice is not only located in verbal discourses, but visual and aural ones too. In other words, performance and music are as crucial a site of black creative agency as writing is. Throughout the thesis, there are examples of the way in which strong ensemble black performances elevated certain texts and afforded them a degree of authenticity – *The Fosters* being a case in point. In the same way, both the performances and reggae music in *Babylon* allowed the black voice to 'tell it like it is' (this can be contrasted with the 'inauthentic' use of soul music in *Black Joy*). Here we can also consider Horace Ové's writing of lyrics for *Pressure* and *A Hole in Babylon* and his use of the reggae star Sammy Abu. What can be seen then, is the diversity of black creative expression across a range of fields and the contested nature of this voice. There is no 'grand narrative' whereby the black creative voice becomes less contested as the decade progresses; rather there is an ongoing struggle for authenticity and autonomy, in which certain voices emerge, are compromised or sometimes silenced.

Jamal Ali's story provides an exemplar of the black creative voice. As Part 3 demonstrates, Ali's voice is strongly autobiographical, but seldom singular; it moves beyond his own personal history to document the struggles of his local Brixton

community. Certainly, in the case of Ali's performance poetry, his work with RAPP and the Black Theatre of Brixton, this politicised collective voice became a powerful means of black articulation - Ali's radical black theatre was 'for, by and about' his community. What we see in Ali's story is the way in which the voice is always shaped by context. The voice emerges (or is constrained) within different spaces and/or different artistic forms. To be sure, Ali's voice is at its most powerful, uncompromising and experimental within the spaces of community theatre, but this strongly remains (and is enhanced by) his collaboration with BBC *Open Door*.

Ali's involvement with *Black Joy*, shows how this voice is obscured, to the point where some local audience members question the film's black authorship and others accuse Ali of 'selling out' politically. In this way, Ali's voice no longer expresses the collective – it is alienated, symbolic perhaps of the personal shunning (and shaming) that he underwent in the wake of *Black Joy's* screening in Brixton.

Ali's creative (and corporeal) journey is inexorably linked to notions of diaspora – traces of the Guyanese 'country boy' run through the heart of his work – Jahn-Jahn in *Black Feet in the Snow*, Benjamin in *Black Joy* – but these characters are also Ali's 'own self'. In this way, Ali's voice represents a 'double-articulation'; one which has its base in two geographical locations which interlink in the imagination. Brixton becomes 'home' for Ali, but the volatile, violent and contested nature of the geographical location is written through the narratives of his characters *and* in the difficulties of housing (and keeping) a theatre in the community.

The 'ghetto'

In interview, Ali constantly referred to Brixton as a 'ghetto' and it is useful to reflect on this contested term. As Ellis Cashmore argues, 'ghetto' can be interpreted in two

ways. One definition looks at a 'ghetto' in terms of its 'voluntaristic nature' and this approach places emphasis on 'its positive community features' and the political and cultural activities of its inhabitants (Cashmore, 1988, p.119). A second interpretation places emphasis on the term's racist connotations and, as such, has its roots in post-colonial theory (Cashmore, 1988, pp.118-119). In this way, the ghetto is seen 'as an expression of colonized status', in other words, a 'means by which the white majority' are able to contain and control the black minority (Cashmore, 1988, p.119). I would argue that *both* definitions are actually strongly at play within Ali's work itself, and in the lived black experience of Brixton in the 1970s.

Certainly, Brixton is a place of settlement and recognition for black diasporic communities; here we might reflect on Benjamin in *Black Joy*, who, on his initial visit to Brixton's Atlantic pub, is greeted by a smiling black man who cheerily tells him, 'This is where we darkies live'. However, Brixton's ghetto is also a contested location - hard to escape perhaps, for those who are in it, but liable to violation from without. If we reflect on the fact that Brixton was frequently bounded by police road blocks, was subjected to the cruising of the SPG through its streets, and was the site of numerous incidents of overt racism, 'ghetto' becomes a more sinister term.

Indeed, Ali heavily alludes to its post-colonial connotations when *Black Feet in the Snow's* Jahn-Jahn refers to Brixton as 'this violent stinking ghetto/this colony of white contraption'. When looking at the double meaning of ghetto in Ali's writing (and within the Brixton community itself), I would argue that James Clifford's work is particularly pertinent. For Clifford, it is at the 'policed and transgressive edges' of geographical locations, the 'fuzzy' and contested intersections where cultural activity is most intense, political and urgent (1999, p.12). Seen in this way, the (physically and metaphorically) bounded ghetto both delimits and enables black articulation.

The long 1970s

At the beginning of this thesis I proposed a cultural definition of a long 1970s. It is therefore worth briefly addressing both Jamal Ali's continuing story and developments in black British film and television into the 1980s. As I outlined in part 3.4, Jamal Ali was ostracised by certain 'black radicals' following the screening of *Black Joy* in Brixton. What followed was a period of almost a decade whereby Ali effectively sought to reclaim his voice within his own community. Ali returned to working with London-based black theatre groups (notably Temba and the Black Theatre Co-operative) and he also toured extensively with his performance poetry. Ali's choice to work within these spheres in the aftermath of *Black Joy* reflected his determination to 'never again compromise' and perhaps says much about his desire to (re)affirm the collective nature of his voice. Ali's 1988 play, *Slipping into Darkness*, written for the Black Theatre Co-operative, dealt with the aftermath of the Brixton riots, and was a plea for black solidarity and peace. *Slipping into Darkness* was a critical success and Ali cited it as fully restoring his political and artistic credibility in his local community. Ali continued to work in theatre, to lecture, and to tour with his performance poetry, until illness forced him into retirement in the mid-1990s.

Ali, then, reclaimed his voice within the context of performance poetry and theatre; he personally chose not to work in film and television after his bruising experience with *Black Joy*. However, black creative voices continued to permeate film and television in the 1980s, although I would argue that this did not occur across such a diverse range of texts as had been the case in the 1970s. Unlike the decade which

preceded it, the 1980s witnessed industry policy structures to promote black practitioners, importantly with the advent of Channel 4 in 1982. Practitioners such as Horace Ové found support from Channel 4, notably in the television film *Playing Away* (1986) which tells the story of a Brixton cricket team who play an away match in a rural village. Its producer was Brian Skilton and its main protagonist was played by Norman Beaton – which perhaps demonstrates that the informal networks forged in the 1970s continued (to some extent) into the 1980s.

Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective were set up with the backing of Channel 4 under the auspices of the 1982 Workshops Declaration (Long et al., 2013, p.381).

The films produced by these filmmakers, such as *Handsworth Songs* (Akomfrah, 1986, Channel 4) and *Passion of Remembrance* (Blackwood and Julien, 1986, Channel 4) were both political and experimental in nature – certainly the collective voice can be strongly recognised in the texts. The films of Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective are rightly regarded as being important – they fully eschew the documentary realist aesthetic, offer re-imaginings of black histories, and, as Colin MacCabe has argued, court a ‘Brechtian audience, [one which is] ready to be awakened into dialectical awareness’ (1988, p.32). However, the roots of this work are traceable to Ali’s pioneering *Black Feet in the Snow*. Indeed, it is interesting to consider how Ann Ogidi’s description of the key tropes in Black Audio Film Collective’s creative output could also be applied to the much earlier *Black Feet in the Snow*: ‘A multi-stranded narrative, visual experimentation, a mosaic of sound, interspersed with newsreel and still photos of black people’s lives’ (Ogidi, n.d.).

However, a key black feature film of the early decade retained a documentary realist aesthetic. Menelik Shabazz’s 1981 film, *Burning an Illusion*, was predominantly shot in South London and, like *Pressure* and *Babylon*, linked the personal struggles

of the main character to the broader socio-political situation (Solanke, n.d.). Whilst *Burning an Illusion* differed from *Pressure* and *Babylon* in that it focused on the experiences of a young black woman, it is nevertheless in the spirit of the two earlier films. Despite the strong emergence of British Asian filmmaking from the mid-1980s (again with the backing of Channel 4), Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) - a thriller with a gay subplot and set in 1977 - owes a debt to *Pressure* and *Babylon*. Like *Pressure* and *Babylon*, it has an authentic soundtrack which features artists such as Junior Murvin – music then, pushes the film's narrative and foregrounds black artistic expression – that Caz (Mo'Nique) and Chris (Valentine Nonyela) run a pirate radio station is strongly reminiscent of the political importance of the sound systems and 'blues dances' in *Babylon* and *Pressure*. Moreover, *Young Soul Rebels* is in the documentary realist tradition and its gritty East London location allows Julien to make broader political statements.

The notion of 'home'

What is interesting about these later texts is that they (and those that I have explored throughout the thesis) are strongly concerned with contested notions of 'home'. Indeed, this issue has been central to my thesis. *Young Soul Rebels* questions ideas of 'national identity', exposes the impact of the 'sus' laws on black communities, and documents the pressures of life in the 'ghetto' (Nri, n.d.). Caz and Chris, then, constantly question what and where home *is*, not least when their studio is broken into. In the same way, *Playing Away*'s black cricket team are regarded with suspicion by white villagers, who imagine that the team 'will bring [Brixton's] drugs and rioting' in their wake (Wambu, n.d.). Some of the white players make it abundantly clear that they do not regard their black counterparts as 'British citizens', and it is perhaps telling that the match has been set up by the villagers to

commemorate African Famine Week (Wambu, n.d.). *Burning an Illusion's* Pat, a young black working-class London woman, is determined to live life on her own terms (her independence is underscored by the fact that she chooses to live alone). Nevertheless, 'home' becomes a political battleground as Pat struggles to negotiate her own needs with those of her boyfriend, who has been sacked by a racist boss. As Jim Pines has suggested, films such as Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* are equally as concerned with the search for home, although he argues that this is tempered with a 'more positive' diasporic sensibility: '[the] narrative suggests a much more positive representation of [black] presence here, and it also suggests potential linkages that cut across generations, for example, within black family histories' (Pines, 1988, p.55).

Whilst my title quote 'But where on earth is home?' is taken from Jamal Ali's *Black Feet in the Snow*, to a lesser or greater degree, *all* of the texts that I have explored within this thesis pose this question. From the Foster family's metaphorical barricading in a South London tower block, to *Pressure's* Colin calling his brother a 'white boy' because he has no memory of the Caribbean, to Meadowlark Warner's 'statelessness' in *Gloo Joo*, contested notions of what and where home actually *is* for Britain's black communities are writ large in 1970s film and television. The notion of diaspora is obviously relevant here, not least in terms of Hall's 'narrative of displacement' (1994, p.402) or Gilroy's positing of a diasporic 'double-consciousness' (2003, p.50). However, Rajinder Dudrah's positioning of diaspora as a dynamic concept, best understood in terms of 'socio-cultural loops', rather than simple 'flows' from 'home' to the place of settlement and back, is perhaps most pertinent to my work (2012, p.100). Arguably my work allows for an expansion of Dudrah's idea of 'socio-cultural loops', which brings forth a more nuanced notion of

‘black creative agency’. Here, we may once again reflect on James Clifford’s fuzzy ‘margins, edges and lines ... of cultural exchange’ (1997, p.7). Consider for example, Anthony Simmons watching Jamal Ali’s *Dark Days, Light Nights* in Brixton’s Longfield Hall, Peter Ansorge’s chance meeting with Michael Abbensetts in the West End, or Graham Benson’s ‘seeking out’ Horace Ové in the hope of a future collaboration. What is clear from this thesis is that the dynamic hybridity, inherent in diasporic expression, encompassed a degree of interracial artistic collaboration in the 1970s that has been hitherto largely unrecognised. In considering the nuances of artistic expression within (and against) the ‘socio-cultural loops’ of institutions and informal creative networks, it is perhaps possible for us to have a new understanding of British culture in the 1970s which affords a much more complex reading of race and agency.

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Simmons, A. (Director). (1977). *Black Joy*. [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Kastner-Milchan/West One.

Starrett, J . (Director). (1973). *Cleopatra Jones* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Brothers Pictures.

Strick, J. (Director). (1948). *Muscle Beach*. [Motion picture]. United States.

Whatham, C. (Director). (1973). *That'll be the Day* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Goodtimes Enterprises.

Wood, J. (Interviewer). (2005). Filmed interview with Horace Ove. [DVD extra on *Pressure* DVD]. London: BFI/ION Productions.

Television

Allen, S., Baxter, R. and Parker, A. (Producers), (1972, April 13 – 1976, November 22). *Love Thy Neighbour* [Television series]. London: Thames Television for ITV.

Allen, S (Producer & Director), (1976, April 9 – 1977, July 9). *The Fosters* [Television series]. London: LWT for ITV.

Allen, S. (Producer), (1977, December 30 – 1979, December 15). *Mind Your Language* [Television series]. London: LWT for ITV.

Ansorge, P. (Producer), & Ové, H., Marshall, A and Jefferies, P. (Directors). (1978, October 31 – 1979, October 25). *Empire Road* [Television series]. Birmingham: BBC Pebble Mill for BBC2.

Barclay, H. (Producer), & Cooper, J. (Director). (1979, December 29). *Gloo Joo* [Television broadcast]. London: LWT for ITV.

Beckett, K. (Producer & Director). (1969, November 21 – December 26). *Curry and Chips* [Television series]. London: LWT for ITV.

Benson, G. (Producer), & Gold, J. (Director). (1978, December 19). *Thank you Comrades* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC2

Benson, G. (Producer), & Ové, H. (Director). (1979, November 29). *A Hole in Babylon* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC1.

Bolland, M. (Interviewee), (1992, August 31). *The A to Z of TV Hell* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC 2.

Bolland, M. (Producer), & Skilton, B. (Director). (1974, March 7). *Black Feet in the Snow* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC2.

Burns, G. (Interviewer). (1978, January 27). Interview with Margaret Thatcher [Television series episode]. *World in Action*. Manchester: Granada for ITV.

Goodwin, D. (Producer). (1978, March 3 – 1980, June 21). *Mixed Blessings* [Television broadcast]. London: LWT for ITV.

Hanson, B. (Producer), & Saville, P. (Director). (1975, January 9). *Gangsters* [Television broadcast]. Birmingham: BBC Pebble Mill for BBC1.

Hanson, B. (Producer & Director). (1977, July 5). *Road Runner* [Television broadcast]. London: Thames Television for ITV.

Main-Wilson, D. (Producer), & Argent, D and Main-Wilson, D. (Directors). (1965-68; 1972-75). *Till Death Us Do Part*. [Television series]. London: BBC1.

Matheson, M. (Producer), & Clarke, A. (Director). (1977; 1991). *Scum* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC/Channel 4.

Prem, T. (Producer), & Frears, S. (Director). (1977, December 20). *Black Christmas* [Television broadcast]. Birmingham: BBC Pebble Mill for BBC2.

Rose, D. (Producer), & Reid, A. and Ives, K. (Directors). (1976, September 9 – 1978, February 10). *Gangsters* [Television series]. Birmingham: BBC Pebble Mill for BBC 1.

Scott, A. (Producer), & Bennett, D. (Director). (1973, August 2). *The Museum Attendant* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC2.

Shubik, I. (Producer), & Saville, P. (Director). (1972, February 3). *In the Beautiful Caribbean* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC1.

Trodd, K. (Producer), & Potter, D. (Director). (1976; 1987, August 25). *Brimstone and Treacle* [Television broadcast]. London: BBC2.

Whatham, C. (Director). (1962, June 5). *You in Your Small Corner* [Television broadcast]. Manchester: Granada Television for ITV.

Stage plays

Abbensetts, M. (1973). *Sweet Talk*. London: Royal Court Theatre.

Ali, J. (1972). *Black Feet in the Snow*. London: RAPP.

Ali, J. (1975). *Dark Days, Light Nights*. London: Black Theatre of Brixton.

Ali, J. (1977). *Jericho*. London: Black Theatre of Brixton (in exile).

Ali, J. (1988). *Slipping into Darkness*. London: The Black Theatre Co-operative.

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please complete and return the form to Research Section, Quality Management Division, Academic Registry, University House, with your thesis, prior to examination

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	195403
Candidate Name:	Sally Shaw		
Department:	SMPA	First Supervisor:	Justin Smith
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	October 2008		

Study Mode and Route:	Part-time	PhD
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Title of Thesis:	'But Where on Earth is Home?' A Cultural History of black Britain in 1970s Film and Television.
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	89799 words

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:

(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: <http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/>)

a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES

e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES
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Candidate Statement:	
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)	
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	FO: 10/08 - 0021
Signed: Sally Shaw (Student)	Date: 12 September 2014
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain why this is so:	
Signed: (Student)	Date: